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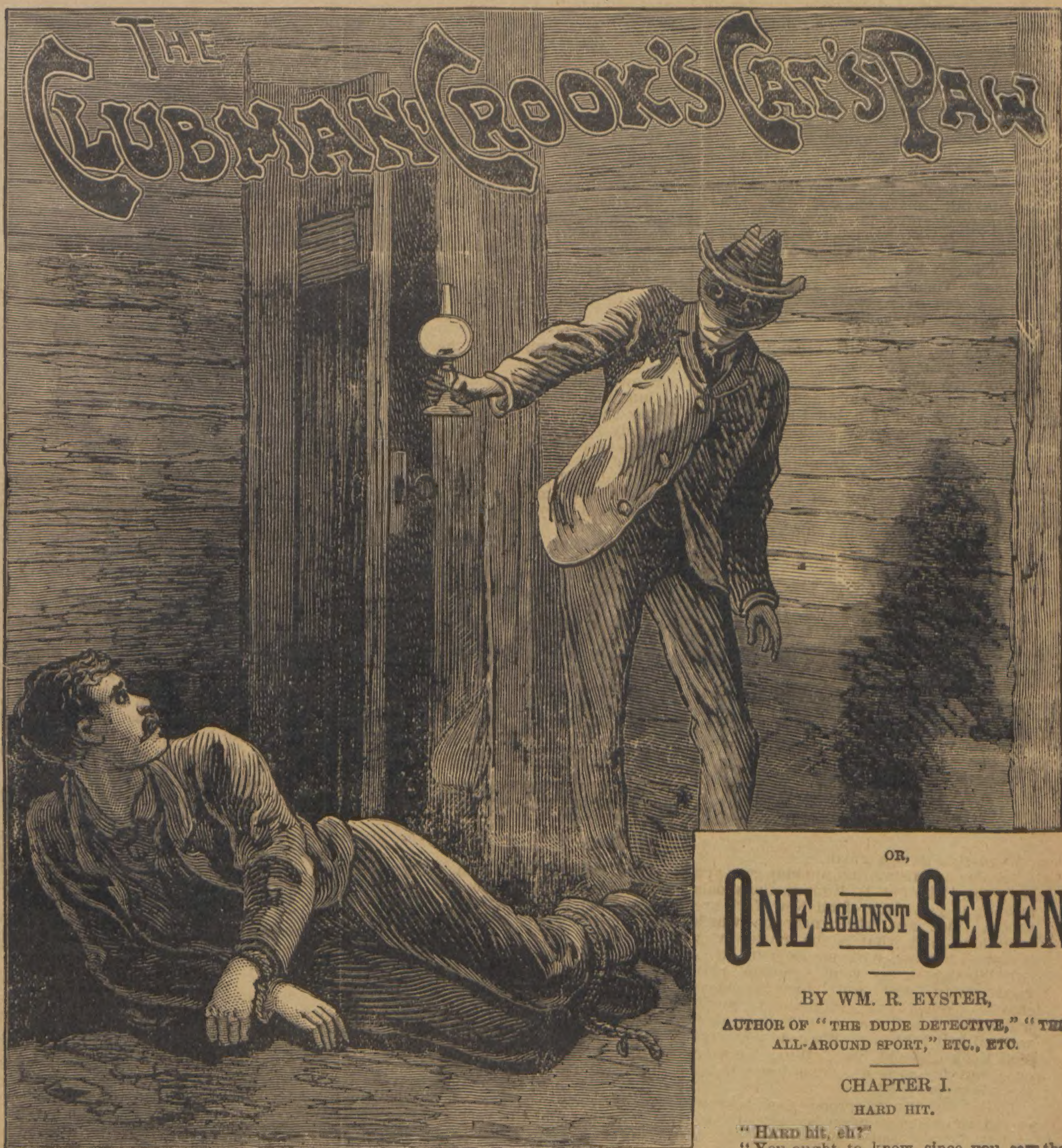
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OR,

ONE AGAINST SEVEN

BY WM. R. EYSTER,
AUTHOR OF "THE DUDE DETECTIVE," "THE
ALL-AROUND SPORT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HARD HIT.

"HARD hit, eh?"

"You ought to know, since you saw the
hand I meant to play."

"But did you play it?"

HEATHCOTE LOOKED UP FROM WHERE HE WAS CROUCHED. "MAKES YER RATHER
TIRED, DON'T IT, PARD," SAID THE MASKED MAN.

"For all it was worth."

"Then you stand to lose twenty thousand?"

"More than that."

The tone of Harry Heathcote grew gloomier, and he seemed to shrink within himself.

He was a handsome young man, and a cashier in the Nail and Lumber Bank.

When he came to the city he started life in that institution and gradually advanced until he reached his present responsible position.

He was well known in society circles, where it was understood he was a young man who would rise higher. He was a protegee of Peter Havercamp, the president of the bank, and it was an open secret he had made several successful deals in stocks.

His companion was a tall, superbly formed man, considerably his senior in years, though not yet at the turning point in life.

He was sometimes called the Deadly Dandy on account of several duels in which he was known to have taken part, and was a man about town, well known in the clubs. The name, however, by which he was known in society was Roger Vanderlyn.

He was supposed to be a member of the well-known Vanderlyn family, who had drifted out from under the parental roof-tree at an early date in his history, returning with a fortune made by his own hands, which he was now enjoying in elegant leisure.

The two were both members of the Chrysanthemum Club, and for some time had been on what apparently were terms of close friendship.

They had met in what seemed a casual fashion, but already the conversation had grown wonderfully interesting.

The "more than that" of Heathcote appeared to give the elder man a shock.

"By jove!" he exclaimed. "You don't say so? Then it takes your pile. It couldn't well be worse."

"No, for it takes my honor along with the rest."

"Brace up, old man! I don't believe you know what you are saying."

"Only too well."

"Oh, you know I am standing by you through thick and thin, but I suspect you are piling it up a little too high."

"No. The accursed raid settles me. I will be short some twenty thousand, besides every dollar of my own. I've had my fling, and for the balance of my days can rot in Sing Sing. Do you believe me?"

"Good Heavens, man! this is not the sort of thing to talk about on the street. Come in somewhere and let me know the bottom facts. Probably I can save you."

Heathcote nodded sullenly, and suffered himself to be drawn away to a neighboring hotel. In a few moments they were seated at a table in a room on an upper floor, with a bottle of wine and some cigars between them.

"Now, open out, old fellow," said Vanderlyn, turning his face away to light his cigar. "I can't see you pitch into the breakers without offering you a hand. Just how bad is it?"

"I have told you. Everything that was mine is dropped, and twenty thousand belonging to the bank. I am lost, and you know as well as I that you cannot help me."

Vanderlyn gave a groan.

"So far as raising that amount goes you are right. The fact is, I am on the shoals myself, as you alone of all New York are aware. But my credit may be worth something, and what is the matter with trying to borrow, with me as your backer? Straighten up your accounts, play goody-goody, and wait for the next chance. When you can make it worth while, play for all that is in the safe; then we will bolt together. What do you say? You know the old lines, 'Whene'er your case can be no worse, the desperate is the wiser course'?"

The extraordinary proposition dropped out in an ordinary, everyday sort of tone, and it did not cause Heathcote even to start, though he remained silent for some minutes, revolving it in his mind.

When he spoke it was with an air of regret.

"Sorry to say it, old man, but I'm afraid that plan will not work. I have until next Monday to get myself over the line, or be decorated for the sacrifice. It is just as well you and I are not seen too much together, meantime."

"Then why not strike between now and then? The vault ought to be worth a quarter of a million, and we'll go out on the Sunbeam with the boodle between us. I'll take her out in the offing to-morrow and wait for you, if you say so. It's blamed sudden, but I've been at my wits' end, and you know it."

Heathcote stared sullenly at the speaker, but without any symptom of surprise or disgust at the proposition. He was apparently revolving what would be the results of such a course.

"You can take it or leave it, just as you choose, but it's the best I can do. If you have anything better to suggest, spit it out."

"No. I have nothing better. I was only wondering whether the reward in sight would pay for the risks. I might slip away now, and it's doubtful if they would trouble themselves to chase very hard; if I touch them any deeper they'll never stop until they run me down, and see me housed in Sing Sing."

"Oh, well, I can help you to a hundred or two, and you can slide out at once, and if luck comes my way again I'll send you more until you can get on your feet again."

"Thanks. You are a friend indeed."

"Oh, I wasn't a soldier of fortune for all those years to drop a friend when he gets into a little snarl—though I do hate terribly to have him found out."

"Too late to think of that last. The explosion is bound to come if to-morrow goes like to-day—and I believe it will be worse."

"Then you are off to-night?"

"No."

The decision seemed to be suddenly made.

"Then—"

"I'll put everything on the cast of the die. If the market sets me straight to-morrow, well and good. If not, I'll have a hundred thousand dollars of good money in my grip to-morrow night, and be ready for a trip in the Sunbeam to the Chinese seas, provided you meant what you said."

"Of course I meant it; though, come to think of it, we may as well postpone the sailing until they have had time to tone down a little. Better to lay by for a week, and then the yacht can sail without suspicion. I have been talking of a trip for some time, you know."

"Yes, yes. I will put myself in your hands. There will be fifty thousand for each of us, but say, Vanderlyn, it's what the world calls a dirty piece of business, and I want you as far in the mud as I am deep in the mire."

"All right. I'll be with you."

The two men extended hands and ratified the bargain by a shake that was firm if not cordial. Then Vanderlyn asked:

"When will you work the trick, and how?"

"To-morrow evening. Just step in and carry it off without any one being any the wiser."

"Make a clean sweep of the assets, eh?"

"No. Just of the cash. They won't get after me before Monday evening at the earliest, for it will take them until that time to make up their minds what is wrong."

"But the watchman? He will have a suspicion. You can't get around him."

"He will be sound asleep and snoring. Trust me for that. Now I'll have to skip around. There are plenty of things to do before the grand explosion. Ha! ha! How they will stare!"

Heathcote spoke in a horrible matter-of-fact way, and his companion watched him curiously. Neither spoke as he usually spoke, and the very anticipation of crime seemed to have changed their entire natures.

They said little more to each other, but

went out together, separating at the sidewalk. Nor was either aware that a woman was leaning out of an upper window, watching them with thoughtful eyes.

When they were out of sight this woman turned away.

"You heard, Delphine?"

"Yes, madam."

"Remember, then; but be silent unless I give the cue."

"But who are they, madam? Do you know them—though of course you hardly do, since we have been here so short a time. This seems just such an adventure as you were praying for. I trust it will be a profitable one."

"It will be, without a doubt. But we have no child to deal with this time. A hint to him and it might be the worse for us to have gained this knowledge."

"Then madam knows—but, of course! Who is it she does not know? Was it not a strange chance they should be in that room and we in this?"

"Very strange, Delphine; but it is the strange which always happens. It is a fortune for us, since, if each divides with us, we will have a full half. A hundred thousand dollars! It is a good sum, and if we had known it in time we might have had it all. Bah! The thought sickens one. I must find the other man. The time is short, but perhaps I can win, as it is."

Delphine made no answer, for her mistress turned away with her hand to her brow.

She was a beautiful woman, and richly dressed, yet there was a savage gleam in her eyes as she murmured:

"Gold in sight—and, perhaps, revenge!"

CHAPTER II.

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND.

The Nail and Lumber Bank was something of an old-fashioned institution, which plodded on in a ponderous way, making its legitimate profits, and always held to be as sound as the heart of the Andes.

There was not an employe who had not been in the service of the corporation for years, and who was not considered to be above suspicion, from the president, Peter Havercamp, worth ten millions himself, down to the watchman, who owned his own residence, and received a salary which, for a man in his position, seemed almost princely.

The latter, in fact, had a couple of shares of stock, and was considered to be as reliable in his sphere as Havercamp himself. He understood his duties, was proud of them, and so far as was known had always performed them in a perfectly conscientious and competent manner.

He came on guard at precisely the same minute every evening, made his rounds in precisely the same manner, took his lunch at about the same hour, night after night, and went off up-town the next morning without more than a word or two to the first men there. Up to the present time nothing had ever gone wrong, and he would have laughed at the thought of being found asleep at his post.

Nevertheless, asleep he was, as two men looked him over with a low laugh. They had just entered, by the front door, with an air of ownership, and seemed not at all uneasy over the peculiarities of their position.

"Poor wretch!" remarked one of these men, lightly.

"How did you do it?"

"I suspect there was something more than coffee in his can. He will probably sleep until morning, if he opens his eyes then."

"Sure you didn't get in an overdose?"

"As sure as one can be who's not up in such things. I don't profess to be an expert."

"But, if you did?"

"If I did, what difference? I don't intend to be caught. If I am I would as soon have the chair as twenty years in prison. Say no more."

He turned away fiercely, scowling as he stepped. If John Owens, the watchman, could have heard he would have no

doubt been thunderstruck at the change in his very good friend, the cashier.

It required no assortment of tools, nor special knowledge of the burglar's trade to accomplish the work that was to be done in that place that evening.

Harry Heathcote knew every turn and combination, and knew, too, that up to the moment when he departed with his booty he was absolutely safe. Should he meet Peter Havercamp coming in as he was going out there would be no immediate danger, and the presence of his companion would hardly be awkward.

Of course, that companion was Vanderlyn, and he showed little nervousness.

"How much is the sum total?" he asked, a little later. "Is it enough to pay for the infernal risk?"

"About what I figured on. With a little more time I could have had a larger sum, but it will not be far off from a hundred thousand."

"How far, though?"

"Oh, rest easy! I will compromise on an even fifty thousand for your share, and count it now, if you say so."

"Humbug! Of course, I didn't mean that. Let us get out of this as soon as we can. I think myself, now it is too late, that it would have been as well to have had the yacht all ready to cut and run for it to-night, but the other arrangements will work."

"They must work. I have trusted to you to make them, and I know you would have told me if you had failed."

"Never fear; as far as they are concerned you will be safe enough, and I will go about my business until the time comes I can call for you."

"And be sure you don't forget to come. If you fail me in this, after having gone so far, you will hear from me in a way you will despise."

"Don't get naggy, old fellow. You will have a lead-pipe cinch on me, to speak after the fashion of the vicious. You will have the 'swag,' and it is not likely I would forget that, after all this risk and trouble to get it."

Heathcote returned no answer. He made everything as secure as when he entered, and even arranged the sleeping Owens so that he would rest more comfortably.

Then the two left the bank, and together went down the street, unconscious of the fact that a pair of keen eyes was on them, or that they were followed by what seemed to be a brisk young man, of slight figure and light frame.

The two walked carelessly, yet with swiftness. After a time they entered a saloon and stood at the bar.

The young man halted, but did not enter. He gave a swift glance around him, thought a few seconds, and then hurried away. It was something of a risk to run, but when two men came out on the opposite side of the block, by a path which led from the rear of the saloon, the same young man was on their trail, though a person less keen on the scent would hardly have recognized them as the two who had entered the drinking place on the other street.

They had made certain changes in their appearance as they came along, had disguised their walk, and looked altogether like a different pair.

"Now, you will have to lead the way, and be sure that you know where you are going. It will not be many days before there will be twenty thousand dollars for the man who takes us."

"I doubt it. They will keep it to themselves at the bank as long as they can, and if it don't get into the papers until after you are out of hiding everything will go right enough. If it does, we must take the chances."

"Twenty thousand would buy the biggest rogue in all lower New York."

"Yes. When it comes to that they can outbid us, every time. If we began by offering twenty thousand dollars, the rascals would want fifty. I have thought of all that. There is only one thing they won't sell out and betray."

"And that?"

"The Golden Rule. You must join the

circle. Once a member of that and you are safe enough."

"What is it? I never heard of it."

"A secret order, whose members look after the interests of one another as though they were their own."

"But how is that going to aid you and me?"

"Because if it is known you belong to it there is not a man in all criminal New York who will dare betray you. The thing has been tried in the past, and it has been found the circle has a long arm."

They leaned toward each other as they conversed, and talked in a low tone, but their actions were not suspicious. One could hardly have imagined simply from their appearance what it was they were plotting.

"About how much is this membership going to cost me?" asked Heathcote, after a little.

"It will depend a good deal upon how much it happens to be worth. Whatever it may be I will share it, and they know me well enough not to haggle over the terms I offer them. Rest easy. I shall see that you are not plucked. A friend of mine is entitled to the best of treatment, and never fear but what he will receive it."

They were getting into a quarter of the city where Harry Heathcote was little acquainted, and what he knew of it was not at all to its credit. He was not afraid, but he was ready for almost any adventure, confidently as his friend seemed to walk.

He tried to keep mental track of the course taken, and when they halted at a vile-looking building he took a keen look around to mark the place thoroughly in his mind. Then the two entered.

It was a long room, with low ceiling and a crowded floor. If they wanted to drop out of sight it was a strange place for Vanderlyn to lead his friend.

Nevertheless, it was not likely any one here would recognize them. When Heathcote looked into the face of his companion he hardly could recognize it himself; while he knew the changes in his own appearance had been almost as great.

"Game running to-night?" asked Vanderlyn of one of the men behind the bar.

"Wide open," was the answer. "Up the stairs, and the first door. You know the way."

Vanderlyn nodded, and made his way toward a door on the opposite side of the room, which opened into a little hall from which a pair of stairs ran upward.

The young man who had been on the trail saw the door close behind them.

"Up or down?" he asked of himself.

"They will pluck him in the one room, or murder him in the other. There is little hope for the man who is in the clutches of the Golden Rule."

CHAPTER III.

TREACHERY.

Vanderlyn did not ascend the stairs, but passed around their base and halted in a little alcove.

Here he pressed upon a nail which projected slightly from the wall at a height a little above his head.

It was done carelessly, yet after a method, and, dropping his hand to Heathcote's shoulder, he stood waiting for the length of time he could slowly count thirty. Then he pressed the heel of his boot upon one corner of the matting upon which they were standing, and instantly, as it seemed, the floor began to sink with them.

Harry had been cautioned to keep silent, and he never uttered a word, while the hand on his shoulder could feel no tremor, though what happened had been totally unexpected.

The trap door slowly descended to the level of the cellar below, and when the two men had stepped from it, arose again to its place, leaving the companions in perfect darkness.

They advanced boldly, however, Vanderlyn counting as he stepped. At ten paces he halted and rapped thrice on the door which he knew was in front of him.

The door flew open, but at the same time came a challenge from beyond:

"Halt! Who steps there?"

"A friend."

"Why is he a friend?"

"Because he is a brother of the Rule."

"What rule?"

"Number One."

"Are you alone?"

"No. There is one with me who seeks to enter the council."

"Who vouches for him?"

"I, a brother of the Supreme Council, vouch for him."

"Advance, brother, and give the word."

The voice seemed to come from directly in front, but Vanderlyn, after taking one step forward, turned sharply to the right, and, moving on a certain distance, leaned to the side and whispered the password.

After a brief period of waiting the same voice already heard called out from its old location:

"Correct, brother! Take the candidate to the ante-room, and let me warn you both to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Otherwise, your fate is sealed."

The mummery appeared to have been carefully rehearsed, and it struck Heathcote that preparations for his reception had been made long enough before his coming. For the first time he began to doubt the good faith of the Deadly Dandy.

It was too late now to draw back, and he was by no means alarmed. He was something of an athlete himself, and had a revolver on which he knew he could rely.

The ante-room did not appear to be far distant, for in a moment Vanderlyn had drawn him through a door and once more halted, whispering:

"You will have to stop here, while I complete the arrangements. There will be nothing to fear."

Left alone by his companion, Heathcote did not feel altogether comfortable. He listened intently, and the voice of Vanderlyn came to him, though but faintly.

Heathcote put on a bold front when he felt a firm hand clasped on either shoulder, as occurred after a few moments' waiting. He had heard enough of the conversation to alarm, but not to intimidate him.

And it was too late, now, to draw back. In the semi-darkness he could not possibly fight his way through the closed doors, if he should attempt escape, and the desperate men, who knew exactly where to find him, would, even if he did get away, have him in their grip.

So he submitted in silence, and was led forward. From the murmur and buzz it was certain there were not less than a dozen of these men, and he had his doubts whether Vanderlyn could save him if he would, provided harm was meant by the members of the circle.

For a moment there was a glimmer of light, showing a wall of dark forms surrounding him.

"Is the candidate properly guarded?" asked a stern voice in the distance.

"He is!" responded a dozen voices.

"Then let him answer truly, for his life depends upon it."

A nearer voice took up the theme.

"Candidate, are you tired of life?"

"I am, but not enough to throw it away. I am willing to die, but when I go I mean to die fighting."

"Bravely said! Such men are the brothers we would have in our circle. What offering have you to bring?"

"You have heard. It is more than I would have given, but what bargain my friend makes I stand to. But, on my side, I must have safety."

"By your own words, and that of your friend, will you be judged. Bind him!"

There was a flash and a roar in the darkness, for, without hesitation, Heathcote had fired through his pocket the revolver on which his hand rested, aiming as well as he could in the direction of the voice.

The action was instinctive, but it did him no good. Instead, he was wrenched

from his feet and flung on the floor, where he was disarmed and his hands bound.

He uttered no word of remonstrance, and ceased to struggle the moment his case seemed hopeless.

While he lay there the vault was suddenly illuminated, and he could see a throng of masked men surrounding him.

"Let him be searched!" spoke the leader.

There was an interval of silence while busy hands went into his pockets to draw out their contents, which, unexamined, were handed over to the man acting as leader, who tore open the packages. Then he went over the satchel which Harry had carried in his hand.

This done, Harry Heathcote was marched off between two guards.

The cell to which he was conveyed was simply a small stone closet, in one corner of which hung a lighted lantern.

Into this he was thrust, and the stout door closed behind him. A bolt was shot, and with his hands still bound, he sank down to the ground, since there was no other seat, and, closing his eyes, began to consider how much of this was farce, and how much stern reality.

Even if Vanderlyn was true to him, seventy-five thousand dollars was an enormous stake to play for; and if the circle deprived him of that amount it was not likely the gang would ever trust him while living.

The men without were still on guard, and under the door there was crevice enough to hear their voices greeting a new arrival.

"It's you, is it? No use to ask what's the game. When Bob Klocker goes to the front somebody always disappears."

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN OF NERVE.

There was a low answer which did not reach the ears of the prisoner, but he heard the same voice again.

"All right, if you think it's safe. We don't care to have a hand in, and it's what you're paid for."

Immediately afterward departing footsteps were heard shuffling away, and the door was thrown open.

Heathcote looked up from where he was crouched.

On the threshold stood a man about his own size and build, roughly dressed, and with a mask on his face.

"Makes yer rather tired, don't it, pard?"

"Very. What is to come, may make me weaker yet. How is it to be?"

"Can't tell the orders of the council, but reckon you'll know them when you get through," and the masked man scratched his head as he spoke, and gazed at Heathcote in what seemed rather a perplexed manner.

"You look as though they did not altogether agree with you."

"Hanged if they do, no more than they will with you, either."

The prisoner had been raising himself up languidly. At this he acted with a suddenness and strength that were surprising. His hands were no longer bound, and they shot out and closed upon the fellow with an awful grip.

Before the man could struggle or cry out he was twisted over Heathcote's hip, was jammed upon the floor with a choking clutch on his throat.

"Now, then, young man, you can live or die, just as you choose to have it. Swear to me you will be silent, or not raise your voice above a whisper, while I question you. If you are not willing to do that you must die, right here and now."

There was no nonsense about this, for Harry meant every word he said. It did not take Klocker a minute to make up his mind.

"It's your deal, pard. Throw the cards and I'll ante up when my turn comes."

"In few words, then; what were your orders about me?"

"To get rid of you; to shut off your breath."

"And you would have done it?"

"How could I help it? You or me it

had to be, and we all look out for number one."

"How were you to do it?"

"Drops, if you would take 'em. If not, the choke."

"And then what?"

"Put ye'r stiff in a bag and tote it out, same way it has been done before."

Harry had no time to shiver, but the manner of the fellow was cool enough to send a chill to the bone.

"You are a hardened villain, and I am glad to know it. I won't feel half the compunctions I would have had in carrying out my plan."

"What's that, pard?"

"I am going to stuff your body into the sack and walk out, just as you were going to do."

"It—it won't work, pard," protested Klocker, as he began to realize the seriousness of the situation; "they'll be on to you before you have struck the second door. I'm only tellin' you for ye'r own good. I've been badgered by 'em till I don't keer myself much if I lives er dies."

"You could pass, could you not?"

"Of course."

"Then what do you say to a little bargain? Give me the points. We'll change clothes, I'll put you alive in the sack, and when we are safely out of this infernal den we'll go to your hiding place and both of us lie low. The minute I am in safety I'll give you five thousand dollars, and if you serve me after that, and I need you, I'll pay as well in the future."

"Sounds good; but how'll you pay?"

"In good, honest money. They weren't sharp enough to clean me out, quite. Look at these!" and Heathcote drew from a secret pocket a roll of notes which he held up to the face of the other.

"You are a keen one! If you swear never to betray me I'll go into the thing as far as I can."

"I will swear."

"Then let me up. You can trust me, now."

The sudden decision may have been a surprise to Heathcote, but he was quick to take advantage of it.

Watching keenly, he removed his grip once more, and allowed Klocker to rise to a sitting posture.

Bob understood that, for the present, he was thoroughly in the power of the intended victim, and he had an eye to earning the five thousand, which could only be done by helping him to get away.

"It's a big risk, pard, but it will give yer a chance to fight, and mebbe to run away. I can post you, but can you remember?"

"I never forget. Tell me how to pass out of this charnel house and I'll make my way without missing a turn. Tell me first, and then to business. There is no time to be lost."

Briefly, but completely, Klocker described the manner of making the exit, and when he was done Harry repeated it after him.

"About how soon would they expect your work to be done?" he asked, finally, of the executioner.

"They're looking for me about this time. If you mean sport we had better be up and a doing."

"Very well. Off with your clothes."

The exchange was soon made, and with the mask of Bob Klocker over his face, Heathcote made a very picture of that desperado.

Klocker looked at the counterpart of his late self with a grin.

"You'll pass in the crowd if you can keep your heart up and carry the weight. But the load won't be a light one, and if you give as much as a stumble we're both lost."

"If that is all, you can count on safety. I could carry two of you, one in each hand. You have felt my grip, you ought to believe me."

Which was not an idle boast. Heathcote was an all-around athlete, cashier though he was, and had taken a course of training in the gymnasiums which now would fit him for the unexpected work he must perform.

"I'll see how you swing the sack. After that I'll know whether to let you go

ahead, or to give a howl. I may as well die right off as wait a few minutes and get it in worse shape still."

The sack was there and all ready.

"You have carried it before?" he asked, as he held it up, and noted that it was both large and strong.

"I have; but that is not telling what sort of a load I had in it. I never expected to go out in the same way."

"Here you go, though, and if the worst comes to the worst, say what you like and I will back you in it, though your best scheme would be to put up as good a fight as you know how."

"I'll fight when I can do no better. Get me into the bag. Some one will come to see what is the matter if we lose much more time."

"Just what I would want," exclaimed Heathcote, cheerfully, at the same time, however, drawing up the mouth of the sack.

"Get yourself done up as much in a ball as you can, and then stay there. I must get you out before the rigor of death is supposed to have fairly been established. They may want to examine the body."

"For Heaven's sake, take care! Five thousand is a mighty bribe, but what good would it do if the corpse couldn't enjoy it?"

The decisive moment was at hand. Heathcote swung the sack on his shoulder and made his exit from the cell.

If he was to trust his ally at all he had to trust him thoroughly, so he made his way forward without hesitation, and found everything as Klocker had told him it would be.

Finally he pushed open a door and strode into the midst of the council.

The light in the room was low, and as he entered the circle fell somewhat apart, for the dozen men present had been gathered close together, and were discussing some matter in a low tone.

Without paying the least attention to them the man with the sack strode forward to the altar in the center of the room.

There he turned, and casting his burden down, turned, with his right hand upraised, the open palm outward.

For a moment there was silence. Then from the end of the room came a voice:

"Is it done?"

"It is done."

"It is well! Bear the body hence, and at the next conclave ask for the reward of the worker. It will be yours."

The man with the sack brought up his other hand and struck the two together sharply.

"Thanks, worthy king; I go."

With these parting words he swung the load once more over his shoulder and directly passed from the room.

CHAPTER V.

ST. PATRICK'S PET.

On the Monday evening following, the chief of one of the best known of the private detective agencies of the city received a call from Peter Havercamp, president of the Nail and Lumber Bank.

One of the officer's staff was present when Havercamp entered, and at his request remained.

The chief was lolling easily in his chair when the story began.

In five minutes he was sitting bolt upright; in ten he was fairly puzzled. When Havercamp went away he turned to his assistant, Bruce Adams, by name.

He was still unable to determine exactly what was wanted, and was not above taking counsel.

"Then you think?"

They had talked the matter over for some time.

"I suspect it's a Canada case, and he's across the border already; with a little more of the funds of the bank than they care to own up to losing."

"Must be something more in it, even, than that. How is old Havercamp himself? Any chance for the president to have a sleeping partnership?"

"Scarcely. He is just straight business, and nothing else. Legitimate profit

is good enough for him. After a man has a start he knows it always wins."

"Then why does he want to keep the whole thing so quiet? He must suspect foul play of some kind; what is he trying to save him for?"

"That's a question we can't answer until we get at the woman in the case. To go at the thing in such a ridiculous fashion, with one's hands all tied up, makes me tired."

The chief pulled thoughtfully at his cigar, and Adams, who was considered one of the brightest detectives on his staff, gave himself over to meditation also.

So far there was nothing more than a hint at a big case in the background; but anything connected with the Nail and Lumber Bank was apt to turn out a celebrated affair.

Before either of them cared to speak again the boy brought in a card from the reception room.

The chief looked at it carelessly, and then gave a low whistle and read aloud:

"Helen Havercamp! An immediate interview desired!"

"The daughter of the president," he added, looking up at his assistant, who nodded in a dogmatic way as he answered:

"We were speaking of the woman in the case. I think she is here now."

"Show her in!" the chief ordered, and almost immediately a young lady entered.

Adams had taken a chair at some little distance and looked keenly at Miss Havercamp, whose face was brought under the glare of the electric light as she halted in front of the table.

Evidently she was under the influence of strong excitement, which she was laboring to suppress.

"You will pardon my intrusion when I tell you that it is on a matter of importance. If I am not mistaken you have been asked to search for one Harry Heathcote, a young man connected with the Nail and Lumber Bank?"

"It is not our habit to give information in regard to matters intrusted to us, yet, under the circumstances, I feel justified in admitting that we have, though the investigation is to be made quietly, and without the least publicity."

"Oh, thank you for the assurance; but I am afraid you may be prejudiced in the outset, and so start wrong. You will believe he has gone away, and look for him accordingly, while you may miss some trail which is close at home. He has not absconded—I will stake my life on it. He has been captured, if not killed. He, or his body, if they are found at all, will be found within the limits of the city."

"You speak so confidently I must believe you have a reason for believing what you say. If you have, and will confide it to me, the mystery is as good as solved. With a clew at one end of the trail, Mr. Heathcote will be found at the other, and there will be no difficulty in following straight to him."

"You yourself speak confidently."

"I have the right to, in view of our past experiences in such matters. Tell me what you know and I will doubtless be able to suggest to you what has happened. You appear to have the motive in the case, and that is just what your father has been unable to suggest."

"Pardon me, but I know as little of the motive as yourself. He would not have left the city without apprising some one of the fact that he was going, and, somehow, I do not believe it is accident which causes his absence. They have been going over his accounts with experts all this afternoon. More fools they!"

"Very naturally. Your father said nothing of it, however, so I judge nothing has been found which reflects on the business capacity of the young man."

"I believe at one time they thought they had found an apparent shortage of a hundred thousand dollars," was the cool answer.

"With which, I suppose, you believe he had no connection?"

"I am not so sure of that. He may

have taken it for some purpose of his own. It would be a small matter."

"Indeed?"

The chief was inclined to be sarcastic.

"Certainly! You must understand that at any time and all the time the bank is secured for more than he can get away with; and that he knows it would be easier for him to get any sum he might want by asking than by stealing."

"Then he has no temptation to abscond?"

"None whatever."

"This inquiry is to be instituted with strict secrecy, lest he be mistaken for a thief on account of some possible irregularity."

"Not at all, sir. If he disappeared on his own account, he no doubt had reasons, which might be defeated if publicity were given. But if he is found I desire an immediate interview with him."

The chief hardly knew what to say.

He was not ready to give up the idea that Harry Heathcote was on his way to Canada with a hundred thousand dollars belonging to the bank in his gripsack.

Something of the kind no doubt expressed itself on his face. The young lady continued:

"You can think what you choose so that you do not overlook the true trail, or noise abroad the fact that he is missing. In that case you might not only insure his death, but defeat the purpose for which you are employed."

"But, really, miss, if you cannot, or will not, enlighten us in regard to the reasons for this strange opinion of yours, I do not see how you can expect us to make any headway in the case."

"We are not paying you for my knowledge, but for your own skill. All I have said has been for the sake of facilitating matters, and to make sure you will look over the ground at home. If we really thought Heathcote was off with the booty you now imagine he has taken, my father and I would say, 'Let him go!' He would not be worth another thought. Remember! Every word of this is confidential. If it is breathed outside it will be the worse for you."

There was a sudden change in the manner of the young lady. At last she had conquered every symptom of nervousness, and had regained what appeared to be her imperious self.

As she drew up under the glare of the electric light and shot a piercing glance at the chief, she showed a face that was divinely beautiful, yet with a trace of hidden savagery which made the two men quail, in spite of themselves.

The chief answered quietly:

"A threat is hardly necessary. I confess you have puzzled me; but, so has your father. Practically, you agree in your instructions, and shall have no cause to complain, even though I lose my man. Would you allow me to ask you a few questions?"

"No, sir. I have found out all I wanted to know—supposing you have told me the truth—and have told you all that I care to say. I am much obliged for your courtesy. I would like to speak to the individual who is to be put especially on the case, but that is no great matter. Good evening!"

"If he has time he will call on you. Good evening!"

Miss Havercamp took her departure, and the two men looked at each other, fairly puzzled over their visitor.

"Rather a delicate case; and perhaps the best way to reach a solution would be to investigate the lady herself," was the first spoken thought of the chief when she had retired.

"What is her interest in Heathcote? I suspect, Adams, that I will have to detail you for the work. In fact, there is no one else available."

"Excuse me. I am not sure there will be either honor or profit in it, and any other man may do as well. A blunder would be bad enough, anyhow, but when it may bring on you the wrath of ten millions, the affair becomes one I would not take for choice."

"But, confound it, there is no choice. There is no one else to take hold of it."

"There is the Irishman."

"The blundering fool! He would make a mess of it inside of twenty-four hours."

"Perhaps yes, and perhaps no. He does make some queer breaks, but he always brings home the money. He has never had anything very important; but what chance he has had has always seen him come out right in the end. And it would be a revelation to the scornful beauty to have St. Patrick's Pet call upon her in the morning to take his instructions and report progress."

"All right! I'll put you both on it. He will do for the figurehead as well as another, and when you run Heathcote down, it will be an easy matter to arrange for the credit to go where it belongs."

Adams shrugged his shoulders, but made no refusal. When the chief said "go!" he always went, and this was to be no exception to the rule. Meantime, the boy appeared in response to a summons.

"Has Burns been in this evening?"

"Yes, sir. He is in now."

"Send him in at once."

Burns quickly put in an appearance, and the chief was as prompt to give him his instructions.

It took some time to go over the ground, and the Irishman heard all and asked no questions. When everything was explained as far as was practicable, the chief looked him over and asked, "Do you think you can find him?"

"It's doubtful, but, sure, an' Oi can trol."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRAIL.

Mr. Patrick Burns was a young man of Irish parentage, and a decided brogue. He was athletic in build, courageous in spirit, and endowed with a vigorous imagination.

He was not exactly the man for a delicate investigation, but Bruce Adams had decided in his own mind that he would do well enough for a lay figure in the attempted solution of the mystery which surrounded the disappearance of the cashier, while he himself would take a hand in the matter in a quiet way, and see where the trail might lead to. However, Mr. Havercamp might want to hush the affair up. There would be some one wanting the truth made manifest, and he would be ready for him or her.

Of course, Burns knew nothing of this, but believed that he was the man of what appeared to be an important case. He received directions from his chief, and they were largely in the form of reiterated cautions to move quietly and keep results for his employers.

Then he was sent to the residence of Mr. Havercamp to interview that gentleman, and late though the hour was to accomplish anything, it was not long until he was seeking entrance at the gorgeous mansion on Fifth Avenue.

His card would have told nothing had it not been for "From C. B." penciled in the corner, which proved talismanic. He was admitted without delay.

"Have you found out anything?" was the eager question of Mr. Havercamp.

Burns said nothing for a moment as he looked his patron over.

And a fine-looking, well-preserved man did he see, who was scarcely more than the middle age.

"Not as much as Oi moight av Oi was sure av me ground. Sure, an' for fear av a mistake Oi thought it would be bist to have yez go over it with me. Av Oi foinde the missing gent what am Oi to do w'd him? Av Oi don't have a warrant he will be moighty loikely to get away."

"Stick a pin right there and mark the spot," answered Havercamp.

"If you have a sure spot of departure there will be little trouble in finding him again. Under no circumstances will you attract attention to the gentleman unless you are ordered so to do. This is one of the cases which require delicate handling. What we want to do is to find the man, without a living soul outside of a certain circle knowing he is sought for. The rest I will attend to."

"And how about the hundred thou-

sand supposed to be missin'? Wa'd ye sooner thrust it wi'd him than me?"

The question appeared to be a facer, which staggered the president like an unexpected blow.

"How—how did you find out about that?"

"Oh, information dhrifts in in various ways, an' we have to kape our oyes open. But ye answer wan question wi'd another. Mebbe ye wants me to fraze onto that."

"Not at all. Not at all. The man and the money go together if they left in company."

"An' av they did, whin did they start?"

"The last that is known of Heathcote is that he started from his boarding house Saturday evening. He has not been heard of since, though, of course, no systematic search has been made, such as we expect from you."

Patrick Burns asked other questions, some of them not without shrewdness, and was answered with apparent frankness. The interview was by no means a lengthy one, and the instructions received were simple. The detective finally bowed himself away, and was escorted toward the street door by a servant. In the hall he was stopped by a young lady, who came tripping down the stairs.

The hall was brightly lighted, and Burns had every opportunity for a good view. In fact, he had already noted that the bank president was an extensive patronizer of the electric light system.

Something or other seemed to hit the young Irishman hard; and that something he knew was the face of the young lady who addressed him. Such a jolly, handsome, frank, kissable face it seemed to him he had never seen. As she raised her little white hand he halted without waiting for the word, and, bowing low, stood waiting respectfully.

"My mistress, Miss Havercamp, wishes to speak with you," was the quiet remark made by the new-comer, as she looked him over in a cool, scrutinizing way.

"I am at her service," answered Burns, as coolly, though taken somewhat aback at the intelligence which had been vouchsafed him.

If this was the maid, what would the mistress be like?

He had, to be sure, seen Miss Havercamp several times at a distance; and, though he had noticed she was a handsome lady, had not been at all charmed at her appearance.

However, with a father worth ten millions, an only child ought to be able to command what service she chose. If Miss Helen preferred such a foil as this it was her own affair. He followed without another word, and was ushered into a reception room.

"Be seated. Miss Helen will be with you in a moment."

With this promise Burns was left alone, and he had time to look around.

There were certain evidences of female occupancy which showed the room was specially devoted to the uses of a young lady, and he was making up his mind as to her peculiar traits when he was aware of low voices not far away.

When they fell upon the ear they were in the midst of a conversation, and it was the maid who was speaking at the first.

"Not very brilliant in intellect, but I can vouch for his honesty. He is an Irishman."

"That should also be a voucher for his courage," responded the other voice, with a slight and pleasant laugh.

"Unfortunately, something more than honesty and courage will be required, though they are very necessary factors. However, we will see."

An instant later a curtain was lifted, and Miss Havercamp glided into the room.

Here she was quite a different person from the half-disguised young woman who had called at the detective agency.

Her magnificent figure was set off to the best advantage by the perfectly fitting and costly dress she wore, while her eyes sparkled with something Burns

could have sworn was amusement. He had not seen her at the office, and therefore was not qualified to judge in regard to the change, but certainly this young lady did not look as though she was being consumed by any terrible emotion.

The chief had more than hinted Miss Havercamp must have a strong personal interest in the missing man; but at first glance Burns was puzzled to make out why she should have troubled herself about the matter at all, when she could so coldly ask:

"You are the gentleman detailed to look up the whereabouts of Harry Heathcote, I believe."

"I have resaved the assignment," he answered, making a not altogether successful attempt to hide his brogue.

"And have you any idea how the work is to be done?"

"None at all, at all! I'll look for him till I foinde him."

"Perhaps his friends might give you some valuable information?"

"It's not his friends to go to; it's his enemies, av he has any. I thought av droppin' in at the Chrysanthemums to-night an' lookin' for some av thim."

"You have the address of his boarding house?"

"To be sure."

"You will keep an eye on every case of a man found dead, and see that none such is buried without making sure the body is not that of Mr. Heathcote?"

"Av course."

"One especial warning. Allow no one to know of the search on which you are engaged. I suspect it is more dangerous work than you dream of. Be on your guard or the same kind of a search may soon have to be made for you."

"Niver fear; I will do the work and foinde my man."

"Without letting the world know?"

"Sure, an' Oi have said it."

"Do so, and whatever the agency may charge, rest assured your own pay will be double. Good evening. Miss Norah will show you out."

Norah and the detective went out of the room together.

"Sure, and that Mister Heathcote is a lucky man, with two such friends to look afther him, an' me to do their bidding. If it's throuble he's dropped into it's not long will it be till we have him out."

Patrick Burns always had a soft tongue for the ladies, and he had no objections to trying its effect on Miss Norah.

In fact, he desired nothing better than the opportunity to open a conversation with this handsome young maid.

Norah did not seem to take altogether kindly to the effort. She looked at him soberly.

"Hush, young man. The liss you know and the liss you say about his friends the better. It's not likely you'll be here soon again, and if you don't want to know what it is to feel the wrath of ten millions against ye you'll kape quiet until yez are. It's a dilicate matther altogether."

"An' a dilicate mon to handle it. But av Oi want to report progriss?"

"Time enough for that whin you have something to say."

"Lit me alone for that. I'll have the clew to-night, an' something intherestin' by to-morrow. Oi don't want to give throuble, but av ye would allow me to call at the door Oi might sld up something that would be intherestin'."

"When you have something really of importance of course you can come, but the less you are seen here the better it may be for the success of your mission. I am not sure it was well for you to be here to-night, since it may be a watch will be kept on the house. Good-night."

The conversation did not seem to have been particularly profitable, but the detective would have been willing to linger a little longer. There was something so charming to him in the occasional little brogue of Norah, which was scarcely as pronounced as cold types must make it, that he heaved a sigh of regret as he turned away.

Then he was the wide-awake detective once more.

His keen eye caught sight of the figure of a woman on the opposite side of the street.

It seemed to his trained thought that she had been watching the house.

"The little witch may not have been so far wrong. Is there another woman in the case?"

It seemed like folly to take up the pursuit, but that was just what Burns did, though in a quiet way, which resembled mere chance.

Unfortunately, the woman had a fair start, and moved with wonderful celerity. Though he followed for some blocks, he did not overtake her, and as she turned several corners it was not always possible to keep her in sight.

Finally she disappeared altogether, and whether she had taken a car and gone up-town or down, or had slipped into one of the residences along the street, was more than Pat could guess.

"Let her go," he muttered.

"Oi'll know her av Oi see her again, and, afther all, my bist hold is at the Chrysanthemums."

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

The Chrysanthemums flourished in style, and Patrick Burns had the entree of their rooms, at least after a fashion.

He was well acquainted with some of its members, and, being a young man who made a good companion, not at all deficient in funds, as well as being occasionally seen in fashionable circles, he was a recognized visitor, who always met with a cordial welcome.

Especially was he at home in the gymnasium, where he had frequently set a copy for their most promising athletes, and where he had on more than one occasion met Harry Heathcote, though there had been no particularly close relations with him.

He came drifting in this evening as anxious to kill time as the best of them, though looking around with well-disguised keenness to see who was there from whom he might obtain a pointer. If any one in the city could give him information as to the goings and comings of the young cashier he would find him here.

He strolled about for some time, giving a few words here and there, but settling nowhere, until he was finally greeted by a little knot, mostly of young fellows, who were just taking their seats in one corner at a card table.

"Here you are, Burns. Casimir has backed out, and we want another man. You play a stout hand, and we need help against the mighty. Vanderlyn is on the war-path this evening with blood in his eye."

"Thanks, awfully; but Vanderlyn is so soundly intelligint that Oi am not sure it's safe to thry conclusions with him."

Vanderlyn did not seem altogether pleased.

"From the way things went the last evening you dropped in I should think the objection ought to come from my direction. If you are going to empty our pocketbooks again I for one shall speak for a limit. When a man doubles his wealth it is time for him to stop."

"Nothin' would suit me better av there was a certainty for ayeche ov us. But whin some win others must lose, and that last is what Oi'm most jinerally doin'."

"Oh, well, sit down, and have no more words about it. You're as bashful as a boarding school miss at the piano, and just as anxious to begin."

"You've towld the truth for once. Let the game go on."

Burns dropped into a chair facing the Deadly Dandy, who held the cards in his hand.

There was some more chaffing, but all of the good-natured order. In spite of what had been said the play at the Chrysanthemums was never very high, and was generally enjoyed as much by the bystanders as by the gamesters themselves.

There were the regulation shuffling, cut-

ting and dealing, during which the outside talk went on, but when the hands were dealt strict attention to the game began.

Several hands had been played when Vanderlyn carelessly asked:

"By the way, who knows what has become of Heathcote? Bryan, the broker, told me to-day that he had been a little hard hit."

"Haven't seen him, and this is his night on. Hope he's not bolted. I have the pleasure of owing him a hundred, and I came prepared to pay."

"Bolted! Good Heavens! You don't think there is any danger of his doing that?"

Young Lyman asked the question in a tone of so much horror that it brought a laugh from the rest.

"Come, now, Beechy, don't take a thing like that seriously or you may wind yourself into a ball of trouble. Of course he hasn't bolted. He's not that kind; but you must remember that the reputation of a cashier is too sacred to trifle with. If there is a reporter in sight you'll be apt to see the benefit of your remarks in the morning papers."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything, of course; but what the deuce has become of him?"

"Can't prove it by me. Probably at Mrs. Marchmont's. She gives a party to-night."

"That may be, but if it is he started from a fresh headquarters. I was around looking for him this evening, and he had not been home to-day."

"That is queer," remarked Vanderlyn, in a thoughtful manner. "Wonder if he is sick, or if something has happened to him."

"Scarcely, or we would have heard of it."

"I believe I'll roust him out at his quarters as I go home. He's on the committee, and we ought to get up that report. That was what I dropped in for to-night. It will be clean forgotten if we don't attend to it soon."

"Who is that you are talking about?" rasped a harsh voice behind Burns's chair.

"Heathcote; do you know anything about him?"

"Wish I did!" snapped back the intruder.

Burns knew who the speaker was very well.

It was Thomas Grimsby, one of the directors of the Nail and Lumber. The Chrysanthemums was entirely too young a set for him, and not at all his style, but he sometimes made his appearance among them.

"He seems to be a very much wanted young man just now. If I find him I'll let him know you are inquiring for him."

"Do so; but if I was a betting man I would wager two to one you do not find him."

"Make that enough times over to be interesting, and perhaps I will."

"Not to-night, or in New York."

"Hello! What do you know?"

"Nothing. That is what troubles me. I want to know a good deal about him. I have a right to. When a young man who is cashier in your bank disappears it sets one to thinking."

"Disappears?"

"Yes. That's the word for it. He walked out of the bank Saturday afternoon, and no one has seen or heard anything of him since."

One of the Chrysanthemums, hitherto silent, spoke up:

"You're wrong there, Grimsby. I think I saw him that night myself. He was on the lower part of Broadway with a friend."

"I'd like to know who the friend was, then. Maybe we could find him."

"Can't prove it by me. About the size of Vanderlyn there, but with a stoop in his shoulders I would know anywhere if I saw it again. A perfect stranger."

Burns pricked up his ears when this conversation began. He detected in a moment that Grimsby was not friendly to Heathcote, and before things had gone far he was pretty sure the director had his suspicions.

He was looking straight at Vanderlyn when his name was mentioned, and it seemed that he gave just the least perceptible start, while Grimsby went on, saying:

"Well, the young man had better be turning up if he don't want to be finding himself in trouble. Business is business, and though Havercamp says it will be all right, I don't approve of that way of doing things."

"Good glory, man! Suppose they have him cooped? You ought to be looking for him."

"Humbug!" laughed one of the young men.

"Who would coop him? He is of age, and able to take care of himself. Like as not he has told old Havercamp all about it. Wouldn't wonder if he was lying up with a black eye."

"And where would he get a black eye unless he had been in something too disgraceful to speak of? The Nail and Lumber don't want assistants who get black eyes."

"Probably that is what he is aware of; but such little things happen to the best of us. Have got there myself, and through no fault of my own. Heathcote is as straight as a string, and you mustn't be too hard on him if he sees a little nonsense once in a time."

"All right. If he gets back to-morrow morning Havercamp can have his own way. If he don't, I'll have the detectives looking for him on my own account."

Grimsby's manner was even more offensive than his words, and Burns had an idea that unless he found his man very soon there would be no keeping the thing out of the papers. The wonder was it had not been there already, with the due amount of scare-heads, and all the rest that follows, when a cashier takes a jaunt Canadaward.

But it was plain Havercamp had been doing his best so far; and just as plain Grimsby was not a friend to either the president or the cashier.

"Oi can't kape him off the thrail," thought Burns, as he listened; "and all Oi can do is to hurry it up and foinde him before the row starts. Av Oi don't, the Nail and Lumber will have a new cashier, an' make it warm for the owld wan."

There was more of the conversation, in which the detective was careful to take no decided part. He was not sure the hour spent in the game was altogether thrown away, for he learned a good deal about Heathcote, and in addition found himself a few dollars ahead.

He would, perhaps, have drawn out of it sooner, but he had made something of a study of Vanderlyn, and decided that the man intended to at least make an effort toward finding his missing friend, and it struck him he could do no better than follow his trail and see what could be picked up.

This was a case in which, if he regarded his instructions, it would not do to make promiscuous inquiries, while he had no warrant for trying to prevent others.

When Vanderlyn strolled out Burns was not far behind him.

But, as he was in the habit of trying to notice everything, he noticed a young man went out just in front of him, who also appeared to be following Vanderlyn.

He had casually glanced at this same young man while the conversation at the card table with Grimsby was going on, and had seen that he appeared much interested, though taking no part. He wondered if this stranger had any thought of interviewing Vanderlyn in the matter, and when he saw him touch the latter on the shoulder and draw him to one side, his ears were wide open as he himself stepped behind a friendly billboard.

Distinctly he heard the young stranger say:

"If you are looking for Harry Heathcote I believe I can put you on his trail. I saw him and a friend go into a place down-town about midnight, Saturday, and I have doubts if he came out again. What is it worth?"

CHAPTER VIII. INTO THE LAIR.

It was just a chance this bit of information came to the detective, and yet, after a fashion he had earned it.

Had he not been keeping his eyes and ears open he never would have got on to the fact that this young man wanted to speak with Vanderlyn.

Of course he did not expect to be able to overhear the whole of the conversation, but the moment those words reached him he began to run over the whole possibilities of the case.

He had heard enough, because Vanderlyn would either come to terms or would not. It did not seem likely he would long stand haggling on the street, and the young man did not talk as though he was going to demand the earth.

If they came to no bargain the two would doubtless separate; and in that case Burns thought he would have a hitch at the young man himself.

On the contrary, if they went away together, all he had to do was to follow, and that would no doubt take him right to the spot where the missing man was seen to disappear.

For this reason Burns did not attempt to spy farther on the pair, but immediately got away from the spot, and so well did he execute his retreat that he did not attract their attention.

At a safe distance he watched them keenly during their short conference, and of course wished he could hear what was being said.

Neither of the two, however, showed any great excitement, for Vanderlyn took the statement in the most matter-of-fact way possible.

"If you know that much it is certainly worth money, and if you will point out the place I will give you twenty-five dollars, which will be a very profitable hour's work."

"Twenty-five hundred, you mean," retorted the young man, contemptuously.

"Scarcely, my dear boy. I manage to get along in life after a fashion, but I have no money to burn. I'm not a Gould nor a Vanderbilt."

"Can't help that. I heard what old man Grimsby was saying, and by to-morrow there'll be a reward out for the missing cashier."

"I can't help that."

"And I don't want to. The bigger the reward the more I will make out of it. That's all."

"I guess I can wait, then, and let the others folks pay it for me."

"All right, but if you were wise you would deal direct with me. Make it two thousand, then, and I'll guarantee it shall be exclusive information. You're a friend of his, and I begin to think you want him to get away."

"You know who I am?"

"Of course."

"I'll make you an offer, and you can take it or leave it."

"I'm open."

"I'll give you twenty-five to take me to the spot, right or wrong. And if I find you have told the truth, and that Heathcote has gone in and not come out, I'll make it a thousand. What I want to do about him is a different matter; but I'll pay you the moment he assures me you have been telling a straight story."

"Done! It's straight goods. Fork over and we'll start now."

Vanderlyn hesitated no longer, but drawing out his wallet handed the young man some bills and the two went down the street together, with Patrick Burns mincing along in the distance behind them.

At first the course taken was somewhat deceptive, but in the end his guide showed Vanderlyn he knew whereof he was speaking, for he turned directly toward the street on which was located the building into which Heathcote and he had passed the Saturday evening before.

As they advanced, Vanderlyn began to look with more and more suspicion on his guide.

He evidently knew the true objective point; but for what reason was he leading Vanderlyn thither? If he had recog-

nized the one man who entered the portals of the Golden Rule, why not the other?

Meantime Burns was keeping well behind, but never suffering himself to be thrown off the trail for a moment. He felt that the clew to the solution of the mystery was here, and he was not sure that if he lost it now Vanderlyn would be willing to place it again in his hands.

However, if such a catastrophe did happen, he would be able at least to know the neighborhood in which future work would have to be done.

Steadily he kept on the trail, and noticed he was plunging deeper into the heart of an uncomfortable district, where a bank cashier would have a hard time of it if he fell into the hands of its denizens, and where it might not be altogether pleasant to be recognized as a detective if the opportunity was ripe to make an attack upon him.

Finally he saw the two stop, confer a few moments, and then enter what looked to be a low groggery.

Had they reached the end of their journey, and was this the house into which Heathcote passed when he vanished?

Burns was inclined to think it was, but how was he to find out?

It would not do to allow Vanderlyn to know he was on the trail, nor was it a safe thing for him to enter there himself in his present garb. He wished heartily he was in disguise, but it was too late for that. Any moment the two might come out and start again on their journey.

He went on until he came near to the building, when he halted and scanned it narrowly.

While he stood there, fixing the locality of the place in his mind, and taking in all its surroundings, he heard a piping voice at his side, which caused him to turn with a start. An instant before he had been strangely alone, and the speaker had come like a ghost.

"Say, pard, be youse pipin' der culls?"

The speaker was a small boy, of perhaps a dozen years of age.

He was clad in some cast-off clothing a mile too big for him. His pantaloons had once belonged to a full-grown man, and the bottoms of the legs were rolled over and over until they ridged around his ankles, while the waist was plaited in with a broad belt.

The shirt that he wore was built after the same extensive pattern, and the sleeves were rolled up in like fashion.

On his head he wore an ancient Derby hat, with part of the rim missing, and an awful dinge knocked in its crown.

Burns sized him up at once as a sharp, shrewd, street gamin, who could not easily be bluffed or beaten.

The lad knew he was following the two men—would he be friend or foe?

There was nothing better to do than to feel him cautiously. Under the circumstances a boy was not at all to be despised.

"Faith, an' Oi'm afeared Oi don't onderstand yez at all, at all. Pipin'—pipin'? Sure, an' phat do yez mane?"

"Oh, stow that, cull. I dropped to youse as a fly cop 'way back, an' I b'in a stagin' ye'r nibs to see youse knocked out. Better hoof it, pard. It's mighty dusty on this pad."

Burns's eyes twinkled, there was a smile on his lip, and he looked over the lad with a comically puzzled glance.

"Is it Grake you're spakin'?"

"Youse must be flat ter kim' down here an' not patter der flash. What is it youse givin' me? Better hike it out of d'is if youse be d'at kind."

The boy seemed to speak in earnest, and as though his advice was kindly meant.

"Oi'm not sure it's good to be thrustin' ye, but Oi loike ye'r face," replied Burns, suddenly changing his ground.

"It's afther thim two Oi wor', but joust to say where they wor' goin', an' to hear what they wor' sayin', av the chance came. Mebbe you could do that same for me. It's gelter in ye'r kiksies av ye do."

"Now youse are a shoutin'. Put it d'ere, pard. I'd help youse if I could, but Red John has me spotted."

"Red John?"

"Yep. D'e duck d'at runs the mill. D'e queer bluffer."

"Do yez live near here?"

"Youse kin put up on d'at. Got a berth in Lannigan's cellar all by meself, alone. Ef youse ever wants ter call, dub the areay jigger, an' kim in wi'dout knockin'."

"Sure, an' Oi wouldn't moinde to call now; an' av ye can take me there wi'dout bein' sane, it's the rint for the whole month Oi'll be pa'in' for a minnit in the darruk."

Burns accentuated his brogue for a purpose, and waited eagerly for an answer.

"D'at's a go. Foller ye'r leader, an' I'll take youse right dere."

From the detective's manner the boy made up his mind there was no time to spare, and led the way with a readiness rather unexpected. It might be a trap, of course, but Burns followed promptly, if on guard.

Not very far away, though, they dived down a rickety stairway which led from the sidewalk, and passed through a door to which the boy evidently had the key.

"Here youse be. Git ye'r small change ready while I show a glim. It's two cases a month, an' liberal ter be moved 'thout notiss."

By the time the lad had lit a smoky lamp the detective had ready a couple of dollars in small change, and, having handed that over, began a lightning change act which was both instructive and amusing to the youth who was looking on.

Burns had been prepared for some such emergency as this, and by throwing off some pieces of clothing, and turning others, in an incredibly short time had worked a wonderful change in his appearance.

"Holy gee! Youse a sport from 'way back! Youse goin' inter Red John's?"

"That's the oidea, an' ye must be afther seein' Oi am thrustin' ye wi'd me loife."

"Couldn't find a boy who could take better keer ov it. But if d'ey drop to yer what shall I be doin'? Jest as well ter have a friend on der outside."

"They mustn't drap to me," was his answer as they hurried along; for after the change was made in his costume Burns wasted no time in the basement.

"Joost moinde an' kape a quiet mouth in ye'r head. Av ye don't give me away Oi'll be all roight. Drap back a bit, it won't do to be sane togeth'er."

The lad slunk into the shadow without a word, and Burns, changing his gait to correspond with his clothing, stepped inside of Red John's. His disguise was not as perfect as he would have liked to have it, but he fancied he would be able to pass for a sport from the West.

If not, he hoped he was able to take care of himself.

CHAPTER IX.

UNMASKED.

Though the detective had been expeditious beyond his hopes in finding a place in which to make his change of costume, there was still a good deal of time lost, and he hardly hoped to gain much directly from the two he had followed to Red John's.

He did think he might be able in some way to light upon traces of the missing man, for he believed this was the place where he had disappeared.

In this he was mistaken, but for all that his move to investigate was not a bad one.

It might have been better still if he could have entered immediately in the wake of his quarry.

When the two came in the young man led the way like one well acquainted with the place.

In the front room were a number of men, lounging around, but he gave no second glance at them. A gesture of his caught the eyes of the bartender, but he

passed on into a rear room where there were several stalls with curtains, all of them happening to be vacant.

In one of these the two took their seats, and Vanderlyn, looking squarely into the face of the other, leaned forward on the table between them.

"Well?"

"Well yourself. The question is, whether I haven't got you dead to rights?"

"I am afraid I do not understand you. So far you have not pointed out the place as agreed."

"I have brought you near enough to show you I can do the rest; but it might not be healthy if I went all the way. Eh?"

"I see one thing, young man. You are what is called 'on the cross.'"

"I am on the make."

"You want to blackmail me. You think you know me, but you certainly do not, or you would never undertake such an operation."

"With what I know you must see you will either come down or go up."

"You are trifling with your own life; while I defy you to harm me."

"Not if it is proved that you were the last person seen with the missing cashier, and that, on Friday afternoon, you were conspiring with him to rob the bank of fifty thousand dollars?"

"Can you prove it?"

"It can be proved," answered the young man, evasively.

"I think not. You imagine you can frighten me out of a good pile. Let me tell you I never was frightened in my life, and I never throw up my hands."

"You are mad."

"Not a bit of it. Before you can start your machinery to working I will know all about you, and can render useless any statements you might make."

"My statements are one thing; my proofs will be another."

Without heeding the interruption Vanderlyn went on:

"Besides that, I have strong doubts if you will ever live to make the revelation. You would hardly attempt it unless you were a fool and a madman."

"You threaten me!" exclaimed the young man, who had his hand hidden in his breast.

"No. Only tell you what will happen if you have made no mistake in this matter."

Vanderlyn was perfectly cool, and gave no sign of being either angered or surprised. He stopped speaking long enough to light a cigar, and then went on:

"If I am that sort you would never reach a police station alive. In fact, it is very doubtful whether you would go out of this house living."

"Indeed! You seem to think you are in one of the dens where you reign supreme. You will find yourself badly mistaken. I have half a dozen friends within call, even if I am not able to take care of myself."

"Humph! I could kill you before your friends could get half way here, in spite of that pistol your hand is resting on. You don't suppose I could come in here without any one being the wiser? Hark!"

From the noise that came in from the front room it seemed as though a body of men had just entered.

Vanderlyn gave a low whistle, and then clapped his hands together sharply.

That this was a signal went without saying. In reply the first muttering of a rising uproar came from the outer room, while Vanderlyn suddenly leaned over the table and made a grasp at the shoulder of the young man.

The movement was quick, but the act of the other was quicker.

He slipped from his seat, and out of the stall, drawing the revolver whose existence Vanderlyn had already suspected, and aiming the weapon back over his shoulder as he went, darted for the door. If Vanderlyn had made a second offensive movement a shot would have followed.

To the patrons of Red John there was something mysterious about the affair

which followed, for this party which came surging in started a riot before they well knew it was arising. As, however, they were nothing loth, the matter proceeded so much the more rapidly.

First there was some brawling, and then came a blow. After that there was a general mixture, and it was not likely attention would be distracted from what was going on there.

There were two men who were not in it at all.

They entered quietly at the tail end of the procession, and stood waiting just inside until the signal given by Vanderlyn.

Then, paying no attention to the affray around the bar, they made their way straight toward the other room.

So swift were their movements that as the door was thrown open from the other side they were on the threshold, and suddenly throwing their arms around the young man bore him back and closed the door behind them.

Another door led still further back, and at this they dashed, while Vanderlyn retained his seat, looking on in what seemed quiet amusement. No attention was paid to him, though he appeared to neither court nor shun observation.

It was just at this moment that a man came stumbling into the saloon through the front door and gave an interested glance at the brawling, fighting crowd.

He seemed to be a well-built young fellow, with a flavor of the West about him. He was carelessly dressed in a suit of common material, and his long hair flowed down from under a broad-brimmed sombrero.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he sprang into the room. "What's goin' on hyar?"

He pushed up his sleeves as he spoke, and was making his way directly toward the thick of the melee when a sharp cry from the room beyond caused him to turn suddenly and dash in that direction.

So far Patrick Burns had seen nothing of the two he had shadowed there, but that voice made him think he had not altogether lost the trail.

It was an urgent cry, which seemed to mean the person who uttered it was in deadly danger.

The detective lost no time fumbling with the latch, but flung himself with his whole weight against the door, which gave way before him, and with a half stumble, half leap, he covered half the distance across the room.

The young man he had seen speak to Vanderlyn was there, struggling in the grasp of two men, who were trying to drag him still farther to the rear.

Burns waited for no explanation, and lost no chances by giving a warning. He was a hard hitter when it came to striking from the shoulder, and steadying himself as he advanced he got within reaching distance and then let go, left and right.

His left sent the one fellow reeling back, but his right came hard enough to drive a spike, and the tough who received it dropped without a sound and lay motionless.

"Git out of this, youngster, this ain't no place for you hyar! Stampede lively, an' I'll hold the wolves back tell you git clear of the corral."

He looked as he spoke, and met with a shock.

The hat had fallen from the head of the supposed young man, and he saw, in that one quick glance, that he had come to the rescue of a woman.

More than that he had no time to make out. His advice was not thrown away.

"Thanks! I'll do that same, and you had better come along. It's too hot for us here."

The answer was still in the masculine voice already familiar, and without waiting for a response the woman darted through the very door out of which they had been trying to force her, and was gone.

Of the two men the detective had struck the one would not be apt to have anything to say for a few minutes, but the other had straightened himself up,

and was not inclined to let the matter rest at this. Burns stood between him and door, anyhow, and he put his head down and rushed in for a close.

The detective had a hard hand, but did not care about bruising it upon the bullet head which offered itself for a mark. He slipped to one side a step, caught the fellow by the collar, and with a sudden trip and wrench twisting his feet from under him, dragged the unfortunate rough out into the front room.

There he stood him up on his feet, and then as suddenly knocked him down.

His entrance did not pass unobserved.

The intruders had been having it pretty much their own way, and were taking things coolly. When the two came surging into the room together, and then separated after this fashion, there was an angry shout, and at him came what seemed to be at least half of the mob.

The fighting blood of the Irishman was up, and he forgot more or less about the mystery.

He shifted to one side and back a little, so that his rear was protected by the wall. Then he began to hit out with vigor, taking the men as they came, and dodging his head from side to side with wonderful swiftness to evade the blows rained toward it.

He was one man against a dozen, and that, too, in one of the most dangerous quarters of the city, but so far he had no idea of retreat, at least until he should have given the woman ample time to get away.

Who she was or even what she looked like, he had no idea; but he was certain that in saving her he saved the clew to the Heathcote mystery, with which, no doubt, this gang attacking him had some connection.

For the moment he had forgotten all about Vanderlyn, and was thinking if he could capture one of the leaders in this affair he would have a chance to learn something important.

Fortunately, perhaps, there was a diversion in his favor.

A shrill whistle sounded at the door, and then a voice piped out:

"Hi, there, the cops are coming!"

The fight might still have gone on, but for another signal, given from somewhere within the room—a low, peculiar hiss.

At the same instant a glass was thrown, which, striking Burns on the side of the head, staggered him so far that he almost fell, and for the moment all was abroad.

By the time he recovered the attacking party had vanished, while the original loungers were either nursing their hurts or looking curiously at the stranger who was within the gates.

"Hello, pard, what's the matter with you?" exclaimed a young man, who looked something like a sport, and who was the best dressed man in the room.

It was the first time Burns had noticed him.

"I'm all right, sport, up to ther present time. They double banked me, but I reckon they didn't make much off the Black Dog from Bitter Creek. I'm out fer fun, an' war' jest gettin' dead loads ov it when they jumped the game."

"Here's the place to find that sort of thing, but you want to be sure it's fun you're after and not business."

"Fun er business, I'm goin' ez I please, and if yer don't like it, keep out ov ther racket. I'm dead game and a sport on wheels."

"If you're a sport, that's all right, but the way those rounders went for you it looked as though you might be something else that we've no use for down here."

"Oh, say; what you giving me? I'm a bad man from 'way back, just out to paint the town. When I saw a chance for fun I chipped, and I reckoned I was going in on your side."

"Looked too mighty much as though you were going in on your own. What do you want here, anyhow?"

The stranger bristled up to Burns, and the men left in the room looked on with curious and not altogether friendly eyes. They were a rough set, though some of the most vicious of the fighters seemed to

have followed in pursuit of the retreating invaders.

"Don't know that's any of your outfit. I'm taking all I get without a squeal or a kick, and if you don't like it you better jump the layout, or put ye'r hands up. Say, pards, I take the straight bug-juice; what'll you all have in your'n?"

He pointed toward the bar, and then stepped off in that direction, the crowd following the invitation with commendable promptness.

"Thought I'd hit yer all whar' yer lived. Set 'em up, barkeep, an' roll up gents, an' drink with ther man from ther West ez hez two chances ter talk."

As he spoke, Burns flung down a couple of dollars in silver, and looked triumphantly at the men who were filing up.

He was not done with the young man who had undertaken his examination, and had trusted too much on the surface popularity his generosity was giving him.

With a sudden spring the inquisitor leaped forward, knocked off the hat of the detective, and made a snatch at his long hair, again springing back like a cat.

In his hand he waved a heavy shock of hair.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed.

"Drinks with him if you want to, culls, but he's only a blamed detective, down here to pipe off some good man for the rope."

CHAPTER X.

IN DEADLY DANGER.

The right hand of the detective parried, or tried to parry, the clutch, while his left dropped into the pocket of his sack coat, though the movement was entirely mechanical.

Though his fingers closed around a deringer, he had no intention just then of shooting.

The fact was, the sudden movement had disconcerted him.

He had not a particle of fear of the result, but did not know exactly what to do. These men were all perfect strangers, and there was no reason why he should have a battle with them if he could possibly avoid it.

As for the young man, the moment he had spoken he dodged back and without a word more hurried from the room.

Burns did not follow him.

He glanced doggedly around at the rough faces.

On some of them he read fear; on others hatred, while a few appeared to be entirely unmoved by the revelation.

"Who was his nibs, pards? He's a brisk leetle liar, an' don't you furgit it. I'd like ter git one more chance at him fur ther dirt he war' tryin' ter play on me. He hit me hard, an' that's a fact."

"Purty nigh knocked yer out, eh?" sneered one of the men who had not yet filled his glass.

"You're blamed right. A straight facer wouldn't 'a' put me so all abroad."

"Say, now, culley, who be you spottin'? We ain't keerin' ez long ez it ain't one ov us. See?"

"Spottin' be changed. I'm square ez they make 'em, an' ef he hedn't knocked me all abroad ther fu'st clip I'd 'a' told him out. Me a marshal! It makes me smile. Why, pards, I'm jest layin' low myself."

Several of the men looked askance.

"What was the game, old man?"

For answer he lifted the skirt of his coat by the hand which was in the pocket and they could distinctly hear the click of the hammer of the hidden derringer as he forced it back.

"S'uthin' with that. But say, pards, who was the sport?"

"Youse tell."

"He don't b'long here."

"Can't prove it by me."

"Reckon he was on dhe same lay wi'd youse."

Such answers as these told nothing, and they were not given in very friendly tones. It was plain he was looked on with more than suspicion, and that his presence there was simply tolerated.

Unless there was some apparent necessity, the crowd did not care to attack a detective who seemed not only to be

armed, but a man of nerve. But it would take little to precipitate a row; and as for intelligence—it was certain no one would openly give him any.

The best plan was to get out of this as soon as possible and attack it from a different standpoint.

He withdrew as gracefully as he could, having first satisfied himself that Vanderlyn was not to be seen, and that it was probable he had withdrawn when the row began.

He swaggered out somewhat crestfallen, and uncertain as to the next thing to do, since he was under orders to keep the subject of his investigations to himself.

No one followed him, and there were few passers on the street. He made his way to the next corner without appearing to attract any attention.

Then a small figure dodged out of the shadow.

"Youse didn't pipe der culls, after all."

It was the small boy who had attached himself to his fortunes, and who had his lair in Lannigan's cellar.

"Sure, and I couldn't 'a' done worse; but Oi found out it wor' a moighty hard dive."

"Did yer hear me tip 'em der beef? D'ey took der first train, t'rough express, when dey heard me whissel."

The lad chuckled to himself as he thought how he had broken up the riot, and looked up sharply to see what the detective thought about it.

"An' that wor' you? Good boy; Oi'll owe ye another case. An' mebbe ye saw the young man that wanted to have a bit av interview wi'd me—an', be the same token, he got it."

"D'e cove d'at tumbled to youse? Yep."

"And who was he?"

"D'at was one ov d'e odder gang, d'at hangs out at d'e Gem. Bob Knocker, d'ey call him; an' when it comes to der muscle, he's just great."

"An' did yez see anything av the byes I follyed?"

"D'ey must 'a' skipped by d'e odder way, er took d'e jump. D'ey didn't come out as d'ey went in. D'e Knocker covered 'em, I reckon."

"Knocker! Did you ever see him with either of them?"

"Wi'd d'e tall cove. D'at's right."

If the boy was telling the truth there might be something of importance in what he said.

"The tall man has been in this neighborhood before, has he?"

"D'at's right. I took a tumble to his nibs soon as I twigged him, but he didn't sport such a bang-up Benjamin d'en. He's in wi'd Knocker's gang, an' shows at d'e Gem when d'ere's a full meetin'."

"Whin did yez see him there last?"

A thought suddenly suggested itself to the detective, though it seemed too wild to hint at it.

"Saturday night. He come down d'ere wi'd a bene lookin' cull, an' d'ey went into der Gem toggeder."

"He and Knocker?"

"Nope. D'at was anodder sport, altergedder."

"Where does Bob come in, then?"

"He didn't come in. He kim' out."

"With the tall man?"

"Dat's right. Wi'd d'e tall man a folerin'. A pipin' him off. See?"

"Well?"

"Knocker put d'e sack in d'e ash barrel, an' de tall man sherried his nibs."

"The sack! What sack?"

"D'e sack he was a kerryin'."

"And then the two went away togither?"

"Naw. D'ey bofe went off odder ways; an' d'en, Knocker, he kim' back an' got d'e sack an' mizzled wi'd it in a tumbler."

"Took it away in a cart?"

"Youse dead right."

"And what did yez suppose wor' in the sack?"

"A stiff."

"A dead body? Holy Moses!"

"D'at's what d'ey call it."

"And what did he do with the body?"

"Took it to the dump, I reckon. D'at's what d'ey usually do wi'd 'em, 'round here."

The matter-of-fact way in which the

boy told his remarkable story was absolutely stunning. Burns did not know whether to believe in it at all.

"Has that sort av thing been goin' on long?" he ventured to ask, when he had got over his first surprise a little.

"D'at's der way d'ey b'in a runnin' it, but I'm onto 'em, close. When d'e gang at d'e Gem meets, Fly Billy are d'ere, er d'ereabouts."

"And you have kept this all to yourself?"

"Bet y'er sweet life. I wouldn't 'a' blowed der gab now if d'e tall cull hadn't trun me down, hard. He gimme d'e cold hand when I wanted ter let him in on der racket d'ey was runnin'. He choked me, pard; an' ef I hedn't turned me tog an' give him der slip, he'd 'a' todged me pate, an' sent me out to the dump meself. D'at's why I'm whidlin' de snap."

It might be, after all, that this gamin was telling something near the truth.

Such kids get more or less near to the confidence of the men of the dangerous classes. What staggered Burns was the fact that Vanderlyn was mixed up in it.

He had known of the Deadly Dandy for some years, and never would have imagined he had anything to do with the birds of the slum.

And, it seemed, he had not yet heard all of the story.

What was it the boy was trying to explain to the tall man when he was assaulted? He asked the question as promptly as it occurred to him.

Fly Billy would probably have answered it if the time to do so had been granted.

Unfortunately, the conference was so interesting that they had only kept a careless sort of a lookout, to see they were not followed from Red John's.

The attack came from a different direction. As they reached a corner, three men suddenly sprang out at them, the foremost flourishing a life preserver, which he brought down with terrific force upon the head of the detective.

Burns dropped to the stroke, and the fellow who gave it sprang forward after Billy, who was, fortunately for him, on the other side of the prostrate Irishman.

Perhaps the boy had not been more alert; but he lost no time now that the enemy was unmasked.

He dodged swiftly, bolted headlong past the man, giving a sly thrust under his knee as he passed.

With an oath the man stumbled forward against the brick wall of the adjacent house, hitting himself almost as hard a rap as he had just given the detective. The boy slid around the corner and was gone.

His very lack of importance saved him, for if the other two men had made a dash he would hardly have been able to dodge them all.

Fortunately, they had flung themselves upon Burns, who did not seem to be altogether insensible. More fortunately still, they had not overheard the conversation passing between the two, and so did not realize the importance of the lad.

The man with the billy recovered himself, the three took hold of Burns, and among them he was dragged into a narrow alley between two of the neighboring houses. If any one saw the performance he was one of the night birds of that barbarous coast, to whom it made no difference.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. GRIMSBY HAS A CALLER.

Thomas Grimsby was just about starting out in the morning when he received the card of an early caller.

"Mrs. Christine Ferrand," it said, and he stared at it in perplexity.

He was acquainted with no such person, nor had he any idea why she should call upon him unless she was an agent of some kind, either for the sale of some article or for some of those quasi-charitable associations which were his especial aversion.

"What has she got under her arm?" he asked, sharply.

"Done got nuffin', sah, onless it's a riddycule," answered the colored gentleman who attended to the door.

"That's it! That's it! Sackful of infernal trash, to swindle me with out of time and money. What did you let her in for, Jefferson? I say, what in Hades did you let her in for?"

"Deed, sah, I couldn't keep her out. I opened d'e doah, sah, wi'dout d'e least ideah dah' was a shemale woman dah', ob d'e femiline sex. She jest wen' frew me, sah, I dun gone dun'no' how, sah, but d'ere she war' standin', inside, sah; an' d'ar' were I outside. D'en she gub' me d'e keyard, sah, an' d'at's all I know about it."

Jefferson appeared to be in a state of mental bewilderment, and between that and his dread of Grimsby, he did not make a very lucid explanation, though it seemed tolerably certain Christine Ferrand was not less persevering or cheeky than the average of her kind.

"Did you tell her I could not see her?"

"Deed, sah, I tole her eberyting; d'at you wa'n't to home, an' d'at you wouldn't see her nohow; an' d'at d'e doctor wa'n't despectin' you to lib; an' d'at you wa'n't back yit frum Europ', but it didn't make a diffabitterence, an' d'ar' she am."

As Jefferson made a sweeping gesture with his hand, Grimsby jumped. He imagined the lady was right in sight.

"Where, where? Keep her out, Jefferson. Knock her down, and I'll give you a quarter. I won't buy another Encyclopedia; I've got four now. And I've no use for anything to sharpen scissors or clean glassware."

"Make it a dollar, boss, an' gimme a club. I'll try it, anyhow, but it may muss d'e parlah carpet."

"Confound you! That's worse yet. Go down and see she don't carry off the gas fixtures. I'll be there in a moment, and make short work of her."

Grimsby finished his dressing, gathered up his cane, and went down stairs with a heavy step, determined to be energetic with the book-agent, who, for at least five minutes, had been under the surveillance of Jefferson.

"What in Hades—"

Grimsby halted in the hall and stared aghast.

There was a piano in the room called the "parlah" by Jefferson; and without a doubt that piano was going.

So, also, were Jefferson's heels—keeping admirable time to a brisk breakdown, his feet patting steadily on a piece of oil-cloth.

Grimsby advanced softly to the door, which was not altogether closed, and peeped in.

The visitor was at the piano, as he had supposed, and her fingers were dancing up and down over the keys, a diamond or two on them winking over her shoulder at the worthy director.

A glance showed the lady was richly and fashionably dressed; and, somehow, she did not look at all like a book-agent.

And on the piano, just in front of the music rack, lay an ivory-handled revolver.

While he looked the lady, who was watching Jefferson over her shoulder, broke into a mellow little laugh.

"There, that will do, my merry Ethiopian. Better to get a trifle of fun even out of an insult. But don't let me have any more such nonsense. The next time I may shoot first. Tell your master—"

There was no use to go further with the message. The door opened wider, and Grimsby stepped in.

Christine Ferrand certainly was not disconcerted by the appearance of the master of the domicile.

She arose from the piano, looked the gentleman over in a cool, scrutinizing way, and then made him a low bow.

"You will pardon the liberty I have taken with your servant, but I really had to give him a lesson. He seems to be radically and irreclaimably a fool. You may dismiss him."

As she spoke she carelessly picked up the revolver and dropped it back into some hidden receptacle about her dress, and wound up with an imperious gesture.

"Foah d'e Lord, sah, it ain't no use ter

demiss d'ls darky, he's gwine right now. Le'me frew d'ar now. I'se a comin'."

He seemed to think some warning was necessary, for he was sidling away until the pistol went out of sight in a way that never suggested the movement he made an instant afterward when, with his woolly head down, and his eyes held tight shut, he made a break for the door.

He came with force enough to split a cast iron panel, but luckily Grimsby had stepped out of the way, and he shot out into the hall, across it, and came with a crash against the stairway beyond.

"Madam, if he has broken his neck, I shall hold you personally responsible."

Grimsby's fear was not altogether without reason; but, fortunately, Jefferson landed end on, and a dent in the oak wainscoting was the only evil result.

The darky sprang up, examined the dinge, hastily rubbed it with his handkerchief, felt the top of his head, and then, remembering the lady in the parlor, shot off down the hall in spite of his master, who was vigorously calling after him to come back.

Mrs. Ferrand clapped her hands together and laughed heartily. She was as much at home as though she was the mistress and Grimsby was the visitor.

The latter was in a towering rage, and as he turned toward her his thoughts were too deep for utterance. He stammered and stuttered, shook his cane once or twice with vicious energy, which, however, subsided into a feeble quiver. In spite of everything the engaging beauty of the woman asserted itself.

"There, there, Mr. Grimsby, you needn't look at me and my card. That is my true name, and you never saw me before, so I'm not here to claim old acquaintance. It is business, pure and simple, that brings me here at such an unearthly hour, and you really must give me a few minutes of your valuable time."

The idea of the book agency returned to him, but, somehow, the notion of buying a fifth set of Encyclopedias did not seem as repugnant as it had done a short time before.

He was not altogether conquered, though.

"Always glad to oblige a lady, but I have a place down-town, where I expect to be called on for business purposes. I must ask you to excuse me for the present, for I am due there now."

"That is it, exactly. I wished to see you before you got there, as no doubt you would take measures to defeat the end I have in view before I could hinder it."

"I do not understand you. What are you speaking of?"

"Be seated a moment, if you please, and allow me to explain. It may be that I will only detain you a moment."

Grimsby dropped into a chair with a sigh. He had heard a good deal about hypnotism, and wondered if he was to be made a subject.

It looked something like it. The lady took a seat, also, immediately facing him.

"I came, in the first place, to assure myself that you intended to carry out a declaration made by you at the Chrysanthemums last night. In case you did, to endeavor to induce you to forego your determination, for the present, at least."

"A declaration, eh? Really, I don't understand you."

"Oh, I don't mean that kind of a declaration," said the lady, archly, with the most charming of smiles.

"I refer to what you said in regard to a young man by the name of Heathcote."

"Pardon me, madam; but that is a matter which concerns the bank."

"And its depositors have an interest in the affair. You will admit that. Of course, my own little deposit is not enough to carry much weight, but still, you understand that after a fashion it makes me one of the interested parties."

"Your deposit! I cannot say that I remember you."

"Possibly not, as I have not long been a patron. I am only in the city temporarily, and opened a small account for convenience sake. It was ten thousand

at first, but I have probably drawn a thousand or so since."

"Ah, I think I remember—not your name, nor your face, which I would not have been apt to forget, but something that was said about an account which was opened. Yes, yes! Rest assured, madam, that the disappearance of the clerk cannot in the least affect the stability of the bank, and as for the young man, he will be hunted up if it takes the whole detective force of the city to do it."

"And that is just what I do not want, Mr. Grimsby. It may turn out very, very embarrassing for me."

"You don't mean that—excuse me, but you hardly had an eye on him as your second?"

Grimsby stammered somewhat over his suggestion, for he was afraid he was on delicate ground, but the lady laughed again, and more merrily than ever.

"No, indeed. It is simply a business matter altogether, and I wish to be saved the mortification of having to pose before the public as having been financially his victim."

"But, good Heavens! We cannot stop for even that if the bank has been robbed."

"But I do not believe that it has, though I am sure something has happened to him. It is giving publicity to the affair that I object to. Give my men at least a little time to find him."

"Then you are having him looked for?"

"Oh, yes. And if I am not mistaken, Mr. Havercamp has not been altogether idle. We will find him if he is above ground, only, my dear Mr. Grimsby, give us time."

The way she called him her "dear Mr. Grimsby" made her appear more charming than ever, and he immediately showed signs of weakening.

"I would like to oblige you if I could, and I hope that I can. To-morrow morning we will know to a certainty whether the bank has been a sufferer or not. If it has not, I, for one, will allow you to pursue your investigations provided you keep me apprised of your progress from time to time."

"A thousand thanks. That is all I could dare to ask. Now, do not let me keep you from business a moment longer."

"But Grimsby was not in as much of a hurry as he had been, and several minutes, if not more, had passed before the lady took her departure.

"Ah, a lovely woman," thought Grimsby.

"A lady of wealth and refinement, and of course a widow. Very cordial, and invited me to call. Blast young Heathcote! He's done me something of a good turn, after all. I shall certainly go; and I almost hope the young man is at his desk again."

Heathcote was not at his desk, but Havercamp had been in for some time when he arrived, and met him frankly, though he was aware the worthy director was not his warmest friend.

"No word of Heathcote, but I hope to hear from him some time during the day."

"Humph! I don't worry about him—how's the safe?"

"All right. There was some little confusion at first, but I am happy to say his accounts come out to the very dollar."

"Glad to hear it, but I'd like to know, then, what the Hades is keeping him away."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LADY AT THE DUSSELDORF.

At headquarters nothing was heard from Burns this morning, but that did not cause any uneasiness.

The detective might have taken the trail, and found that it led toward Canada, as Adams had hinted in the first place.

In that case, probably, the first thing heard from him would be from Montreal, or Windsor. Even then, all communication, under the circumstances, would be apt to be guarded.

Toward noon, however, they heard from him in a way which, though indirect, was startling.

Roger Vanderlyn strolled in.

He was as nattily dressed and as debonair in his deportment as usual, and, being well known to the chief, was cordially received.

"Beastly weather," he said, as he sank into a chair.

"Usually is," smiled the chief.

"That is so. It's always hot or cold, wet or dry, still or windy, at precisely the wrong time. It don't seem to make any difference how the weather goes, it's wrong all the time."

"I have observed that, but as I discovered I couldn't fix it, I gave up trying to do so some time ago."

"Wish old Prob would say the same, and let us poor mortals rest in peace. If it were not for him, I would have been sliding out on the Sunbeam to-day."

"Looks fair overhead, and there's time enough yet to get under way. Why don't you start?"

"Oh, he says there's an area of low barometer on the Alaska coast, the trough trending in the direction of the lakes. The storm center has developed somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, and Hicks's weather table shows a possible location for a cyclone off Hatteras. There are spots on the sun, blood on the moon, and I had better not venture out until day after to-morrow. The storm signal is up."

He reeled all off in an aggravated tone, but rather spoiled the effect by laughing immediately afterward.

"Don't go, then," said the chief.

"I won't; not till the latter part of the week, or some time next. By the way, have you got Burns on the Heathcote case?"

The question was a surprise. There were few who knew that Burns was a detective, and he had hoped there were fewer still who knew anything about the Heathcote matter."

"What case is that? Haven't seen anything of it in the morning papers."

"Oh, come now. You understand. Heathcote, cashier at the Nall and Lumber, hasn't been seen since last week, and there is a deal of private inquiry as to what has become of him. Friend of mine, don't you see, and I'm anxious to know what has become of him."

"We know nothing of his whereabouts, and I suspect you are laboring under several mistakes. What possessed you to believe Burns has anything to do with us, or that he was looking after the missing man?"

"Well, I have known for some time that he belonged to your agency—and didn't think any the less of him for it. For the rest, it was his own action gave me the idea."

"How was that?"

"He was at the Chrysanthemums last night, taking a hand with several of us, and something was said about Harry—enough to make me anxious."

"Burns said it?"

"No; he put in his time listening. After we broke up a young chap met me with a sort of fairy tale about having seen Heathcote going into a saloon and never coming out, and led me off to take a look at the place."

"Ah! Who was the fellow?"

"Can't prove it by me; but he was in the club, and had kept his ears open. You know there are chaps that come and go there without question. Ought to be stopped. Nobody seems to know them."

"Well?"

"It wasn't well at all. There was a gang on the lookout, and I had to extend my muscle to get away. Of course I don't want to get the thing before the people, but if you stroll through that section I suspect you will see some damaged heads this morning."

"But where does Burns come in?"

"It's all guesswork, but I am almost sure I saw him following in the distance. If they gave me lots of labor, perhaps they got away with him. And if they didn't, I might put him on the trail where I left off. I don't want to interfere with you, but I am going to see the end of this thing. And that's one reason

why I'm not so deeply troubled after all at seeing the danger signal up."

"You are sure you saw Burns last night?"

"Very sure; and, by the same token, I am certain that he saw me."

The chief was thoughtful. He did not care to confide the facts to his visitor, yet he was not averse to taking advantage of his information.

"I admire your discretion, and for the present have nothing to say. I don't want to start a scare. But when I see Burns I will send him to you. There may be more in this than you and I are aware of."

"Don't put it off too long. If he don't turn up soon, better put a man on the trail."

The chief might have asked more questions, but some one came in on business, and Vanderlyn took the opportunity to leave. When the business at hand was completed, the chief turned to Adams, who had just reported.

"See here, Vanderlyn, the high magnate of the Chrysanthemums, has been in here, and dropped a hint. From what he says I wouldn't be surprised, too, if Burns had been getting into some sort of a mess. I suppose, now, we will have to hunt him."

"All right. I appear to be responsible. Where was he last heard from?"

"Have to get it from Vanderlyn though it may be as well to wait a few hours yet before beginning serious work. The Dandy claims to have been in some sort of a row last night, and that Burns was not far away about that time."

"Do you think Patrick was following him?"

"Of course. That's what he claims. Perhaps I didn't gush enough over his story. He seemed willing to give me full particulars, but when I turned away he took the opportunity and went. You may as well find out if he is in a bad humor over what he may think disrespectful. He is a man who has to be handled with some care."

"Give me what he did say, then, and I'll find out the rest."

The chief went over the ground once more, and Adams listened closely.

The young man in the case was an interesting feature, and might furnish a clue; but, to proceed, it seemed necessary to see Vanderlyn, and to a certain extent make a confidant of him.

After what he had said it was certain his suspicions were not far wrong, and that not much harm could be done by admitting their correctness.

Without waiting to see whether Burns was going to turn up, Adams set out on a search for Vanderlyn.

By what seemed a strange chance, he found plenty of traces of him, but nowhere came upon the man himself.

A man about town, with no ostensible occupation but amusing himself, can flit over a deal of ground in the course of a morning without leaving any ground for suspicion that he is purposely keeping himself out of the way.

Yet that was just what Vanderlyn was doing; and so successful was he that he finally vanished altogether without Adams thinking for a moment there was anything strange about it.

His calling at the detective office was rather a bold stroke, but the result satisfied him that the agency was after Heathcote, and that Burns was its agent. It also explained matters for himself in case Burns had left any word along the route.

Of course, there was a chance the detectives would in this way be put upon the trail of the young man who had professed so much knowledge in regard to the fate of the missing cashier; but of that he had to take his chances. The fellow—if fellow he was, and about that he had some doubts, though he had not caught the fair glimpse Burns had done—was evidently a blackmailer, who would fight shy of detectives, until, at least, it was certain there was no showing for making a private stake. And, meantime, there would be hounds on the trail, of a breed which never failed.

It was about noon when he received a letter.

There was a faint mark on the back of it which told him it was one of importance, and he retired to look it over.

Inside there was no date, but some solid writing in a fairly legible hand.

"Traced up the party, and it turned out to be a woman. She is stopping at the Dusseldorf with a maid, and goes by the name of Ferrand. Don't know her, but she's not a stranger to New York."

This was all the letter said, but it seemed to be enough to strongly agitate the reader.

"Ferrand! Christine Ferrand! Good Heavens! What is she doing here? I'd sooner have that detective on my trail, a thousand times over. It is dollars to cents she knows the inside workings of the whole affair. She is Satan let loose. Gold might silence her, but perhaps she may find we will use something else even more effectual."

Muttering thus to himself he turned in the direction of the Dusseldorf, and as he went along it came to him like a dash that it was there he and Heathcote had talked matters over.

"And she overheard it!" he mentally exclaimed.

"I must see her, and if she is as persistent as of yore she must—retire."

At the Dusseldorf he found on inquiry that Mrs. Ferrand was in her room, and sent in his card, which shortly afterward he followed upon invitation.

"Ah, Captain Vanderlyn. You have not changed much since I saw you last. Believe me, I am glad to see you."

She arose as she spoke, and held out her hand, which he took with a certain amount of hesitation.

"Be seated, pray. I have been yearning to see you since my return, and will have much to say to you, of old times, and other things."

"The pleasure will no doubt be mutual, but you forget we are not alone."

"Delphine, you mean. She does not count, as I make her my confidant in all things, and she knows as well as myself what it is you have come here to talk about."

"I remember her. She was a faithful soul."

"Yes, to the death, as you once tested. I can trust her, even with my life, so that there is no reason why we should not speak frankly before her. I should tell her everything said, at any rate, and it might be as well to spare me the necessary breath."

"It is not of myself I was thinking. It was her interest I had in view. We were not very cordial in our relations in the past; and I am not sure how it will be in the present."

"It is like you to speak of the past. Why, sir, in that past you ran up a score which can only be settled in one of two ways."

"And those ways?"

"Gold or blood."

CHAPTER XIII.

ROGER VANDERLYN IS PUZZLED.

For just one moment Mrs. Ferrand allowed her true self to flame out through her eyes, as she stared at her visitor. He saw the look she cast at him, and if he had not been a man of cool courage, and of full faith in his resources, he might have shuddered.

Before he had time to answer, however, her appearance changed again, and she waved her white, shapely hand as though brushing away the score between them of which they had spoken.

"Let that go," she said, with the same mellow laugh which had charmed Grimsby.

"I understand the position to a nicety, and there is no need of mock heroics. There is no man who can own to being beaten more gracefully than Roger Vanderlyn when he knows it. You understand my demand?"

"And so you were the supposed young

man who led me on that pretty dance last night. I understood what he wanted plainly enough; but why he expected to obtain it was something else. Can you tell?"

"Have done with that nonsense. You must see I know every move in the game you have played."

"I know of no game on my part."

"Fudge! It is the old scheme, which you worked on Pierre Farrand. You remember?"

"I remember nothing."

"Then I will refresh your memory. He was a man who held a position of honor and trust; but you ruined him."

"If you are bent on mentioning family reminiscences you had better be careful how you raise your voice. There may be listeners—in the next room."

She understood the hint, but went on as before, her voice pitched at a hissing whisper.

"Let them hear—as Delphine and I heard. It cannot harm me. It is your life I am speaking of."

"Ah, I thought it was that of your late husband, who defaulted first, and suicided afterward. And they did say the discovery of the antecedents of the wife for whom he had ruined himself had something to do with the latter."

"Villain! He placed in your hands the proceeds of his robbery, and then was murdered. It took me a long time to find it all out, but gradually, and one by one, I collected the proofs, so that now I know you as you are. You have played the same game once more, but this time I mean to checkmate you—or have a substantial reason why I do not. You have my offer. Take it or leave it; but if you leave it you will have war."

"I defy you to prove your statements, however fair a field you may have. And I doubt if you are in condition to fight."

"And I tell you you had better give me twice the sum I have named than have me start in on your trail. I, myself, have nothing to fear. You are vulnerable at a dozen different points."

"Beware!"

"Beware of what?"

"You are showing your hand too plainly."

"It is the time for plain speaking. Threaten me if you choose. You must either come to my terms, or kill me, to be safe; and knowing you as I do, you may be sure I will be on my guard, both against you and your gang. It is just the same old story. The minute I reveal your character in the past, people will recognize it in the present."

"And when I speak, there is little doubt but that you will go to the wall. A dozen adventuresses could not affect my position. Your past is a book which I can open any day without my hands appearing to touch the leaves."

"If I was poor your threat might make me tremble. If I was hideous, I would be sure you could accomplish my ruin. As I am neither, I defy you."

"You are frank, and I will take my measures accordingly. When next you hear from me it will be in an uncomfortable way."

It began to look like a drawn game between the two. Vanderlyn would not consider the demands of Mrs. Ferrand, while she seemed but little moved by his threats.

Yet he knew there was danger behind them, and that if her story ever came to the ears of those to whom she threatened to disclose it, it might be hard for him to escape.

It might have been better if he had not put her on her guard.

Through it all Delphine sat with a smile on her face, listening as though she had no concern for either, as, perhaps, she had not.

But, for the present, she was committed to the interests of Mrs. Ferrand, and Vanderlyn saw that her eyes never left him. Under the mask of amused indifference not a move could he make which escaped her notice.

If they thought it likely he would proceed to desperate measures, they were

doomed to disappointment. He was neither crestfallen nor confused.

"I understand your platform, and am satisfied. I know, for your own sake, you will be slow to attempt any such revenge as you have hinted at because I refuse to be blackmailed. Nevertheless, I acknowledge you are a dangerous woman; and henceforth you will be watched. You comprehend what that means! Good day."

"I have the honor to wish you a very good afternoon," smiled Mrs. Ferrand, with a sweeping curtsy.

"You have made the mistake of your life, but such a thing has to come some time."

Vanderlyn made no answer. He had desired to see what might be the game of this woman, and thought he had discovered it. He bowed himself out, and the conference was at an end.

As he went away, however, another visitor came, and to his surprise he saw it was Thomas Grimsby, whom he knew well enough as one of the directors of the bank. What was he doing there?

He was the one man above all others whom he would have wished to keep away.

Havercamp was so evidently the friend of the cashier, and so assured of his innocence, that there was little to fear from him for the present; but Grimsby was certain to take hold of the least clew.

Unfortunately, there was no way in which he could get at the conversation. He dared not stop and try to listen, while he was sure Delphine would prove incorruptible.

The best course seemed to be to see Grimsby himself, and run the chances.

Idler that he was, it did not require much ingenuity to fill in the time, without attracting observation, though the half hour was a wearing one.

When Grimsby came out it did not seem that he had been very greatly shocked by any revelations the madam had made.

In fact, he appeared to be in high good humor, and chuckled to himself at the remembrance of something Mrs. Ferrand had said. When he saw Vanderlyn he held out his hand with all the cordiality of a man who is in extremely good humor.

"That you, Vanderlyn? Been looking out for you all morning. Wanted to ask how you made it last night. Any signs of our missing man?"

"Not a trace that I could learn of."

"Ah, that is bad. Heard you say you were going to look for him, and was in hopes you had struck some sign."

"Was in hopes so myself, and once I really thought I had found a clew."

"But you hadn't?"

"No; or at least it didn't look so much like one after I had followed it a bit. It begins to look serious."

"Yes; so serious that Havercamp has put the detectives on the matter, and no doubt they will clear up the mystery in a jiffy."

"An awkward sort of thing for him if he comes back and finds himself brought up all standing."

"Oh, don't make any mistake about it. It is pure loving kindness on our part. Of course, we are short a man; but we would give him his time, with the idea some letter of his had missed connection, if we weren't afraid something had happened to him."

"Glad to hear you talk that way, for Harry was a personal friend of mine, and I could vouch for it he would never go wrong."

"No, sir; his books are straight as a string. He is no favorite of mine, but I must tell the truth; and, of course, I would feel very badly if anything should have happened to him. By the way! Very fine woman, that Mrs. Ferrand. I see you were calling on her. Old friend, eh?"

"Say acquaintance, rather. Have met her, but not frequently enough to be on more than civil terms."

"Gad, sir! If I was as young as you, I'd see if it couldn't be a little oftener than that. Magnificent woman, sir. Understands business, with a big B, and has

all the accomplishments thrown in. You should hear her play the piano."

"I have heard her, and she is certainly hard to beat."

"Beat, sir! She cannot be beaten by a non-professional. And nerve, sir. She has nerve for anything. Did you know her late husband? Gad! He must have been a happy man."

"Their married life was as happy as the average, I believe. I knew him after a fashion, though not enough to hear much about his domestic life; and I had not seen him for some time before his death."

"Left the sorrowing widow well off, did he?"

"That is more than I can say. At one time he had the reputation of being rich, and abroad there are not as many ups and downs as in this country."

"That's true. That's true. And she is not a pauper, by any means, for she has quite a decent little account at the bank."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, yes! But, you understand, that is between us. Shouldn't have mentioned it. My mistake. She's a fine woman, egad! A fine woman."

And, chuckling to himself, Mr. Grimsby went away, leaving Vanderlyn puzzled.

Was this acting, or had Mrs. Ferrand already captured Grimsby? There was an unexpected element of danger in this which he scarcely knew how to meet.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAD FOR BURNS.

The attack on Detective Burns had been both savage and successful.

Stricken down from behind, he had been spirited away from the street in a deep unconsciousness, which lasted so long his captors began to suspect it was a corpse they were carrying.

All the same, they silently pursued their way in the darkness, and without meeting a living soul. The alleys and courts, the holes-in-the-walls and the secret routes made by crime, were well known to them, and they had little fear of interference.

Had Burns recovered his senses and escaped, he would have been more than puzzled to know which way to flee; and any other man he might meet would be as dangerous as these who now held him.

When he did gather together his scattered wits he found himself lying in a huddle on the cold ground, in a darkness so thick that, after the fashion of the fable, it might be felt.

His hands were tied behind him, and it seemed to him his head must be swelled to twice its natural size.

For a little it was impossible to collect his thoughts sufficiently to make even a decent guess as to where he was, and how he got there.

All he could remember was that what seemed to have been but a minute ago he was walking along, talking with a boy.

Whether the lad had played him false was the least of his thoughts. Where he was concerned him more.

Was this a prison, or was he simply thrown into a cellar somewhere under the idea that he was dead?

The first thing to do was to see if he could remove the cords.

They were not heavy, and that was so much the worse.

They were biting into his flesh, and he knew that before long they would cause him unutterable agony unless they were loosened. Already he could feel his wrists swelling under the pressure, and the longer he put off the effort the less would be the chance of success.

The trouble was there seemed no way to get at them, after the first effort had convinced him they were too tightly drawn to allow of his slipping the knots over his hands.

He considered the situation, and was satisfied that under the circumstances an ordinary man would be lost.

Was he more than an ordinary man?

If he was, he wanted to put his wits at work in a hurry. There was no telling how long he would be allowed.

There was a knife in his pocket—he

knew that because he could feel its pressure against his leg as he lay on his side on the ground.

It might as well have been a hundred miles away for all the good it could do him.

Perhaps he might find a nail projecting somewhere, or a sharp edge of rock. If he could only see.

He got up slowly and began to feel his way around with his foot.

He was very staggy, and it was slow work. It seemed to take ages, but finally he came against a stone wall with a moderate bump, and with that as a guide, began to work his way around the cellar.

He turned the four corners, and nearly broke his neck over a barrel which he came across in the course of his travels; but he did not find anything to help him. There happened to be a rounded piece of hoop-pole inside the chimes of the barrel, so that he could not rub the ropes on them.

Finally he sat down to consider the situation as calmly as he could.

So far he had found no outlet, nor even a stairway. It seemed more likely to do harm than good to attempt to attract attention by an outcry.

Besides, he was not the sort of man to beg so early in the game. He decided he would remain silent until he was certain his forbearance had ceased to be a virtue.

About the time he had made up his mind to this he heard a sound that brought him to his feet.

Not far from where he had been sitting some one had attacked the woodwork which he had been unable to locate himself, since it was higher than his head.

There was a splintering, tearing sound as a shutter was wrenched loose, and then he heard a voice cautiously calling to him in the darkness:

"Say, pard, be youse d'ere?"

The voice belonged to Fly Billy. He had not deserted the detective, and had followed the trail so well that here he was.

"Sure, an' av Oi'm not here, it w'a'd be a thing to say where Oi am. Is that you, Billy?"

"Betcher sweet life it am. Where are youse at?"

"In a cellar, if Oi know myself, which Oi think Oi does."

"I sh'd snicker. Kin yer git y'r peepers onto me? Take a stiddy squint. 'Pears ter me youse ought to see where I'm at."

Burns was not certain, but it seemed, as he looked, he could see a patch less dark than the rest of the darkness, but he certainly could not distinguish the outlines of his young companion.

"Well, youse better git a move on, whether er not."

"That's just what I would lolke to do, av Oi could."

"Dere's a hole here ov moderate bigness."

Burns was making his way toward the voice of his young friend. Now, he stood right below it, and could speak in a lower tone.

"They have me hands told, an' Oi can't rowl up hill. Av yez would drap down an' cut thim loose it's the quick move Oi would be gittin' on me."

"Nixey! Not fur Billy. Not dis day. De trap's too thin, an' I'm onto de chances."

"The chances are all roight. There's a knife in me pocket. Give wan dab at the ropes, an' thin, out ye goes, ag'in."

"Dat's fine, but s'posin' dey kim', an' ketch me on de fly? D'en, we's all in de soup. Got a slicker meself, but w'ot's de use?"

"Open it thin, an' sloide it down. Mebbe I kin wurruk the plant."

"Stick it in de ground an' roll all over it. D'at's plumbly. Here she kim's."

Burns did not blame the boy for not wanting to descend into the cellar. The chances of being surprised from the rear were very good. Perhaps the scheme suggested would work, though it took time. He heard a soft thud as the knife struck the ground almost at his feet.

But, almost at the same time, he heard the voice of the boy once more, now lowered to a dull whisper:

"Warehawk, pard! I tink d'ey's kim'in' now. Lay low, an' Fly Billy'll be 'round when de clouds roll by."

The shutter Billy had pried open was hastily and softly replaced, and though he could hear no sound, Burns felt sure the boy had glided away.

In a few minutes he heard a tramp on the floor over his head.

It was a muffled, cautious tramp, and the detective dropped down with his back to the wall. He touched the knife with his hand, but it was too late to use it now if these men were going to visit him. When a streak of light shone down from a trap which was opened above he sat silent and blinked at it.

There was no stairway under the trap, but immediately a substitute for one appeared in the shape of a long plank with cleats nailed across its face, which was let down from above, and then, lantern in hand, a man came cautiously down a short distance and peered about him.

The visitor wore a garment that was a cross between the gown of a monk and a horseman's cloak, while his eyes shone through two holes in a black cowl which covered his face.

He scanned narrowly the ground below the trap, as if expecting to see the prisoner there. Seeing the spot vacant he searched around the vault, and at last discovered Burns crouching on the opposite side, his hands behind him, and a dogged look on his face.

"Stand up!" ordered the intruder, harshly, as he came slowly stepping down the plank.

"Up she goes," answered Burns, without seeming to take note that he was covered by a revolver in the hand of his hooded visitor.

"Now, turn once around."

The detective obeyed.

He understood the object of the order, and was glad he had not begun work on the cords at his whists. Unless he was out of it altogether, or unless this party meant instant death, it was all the better that his bonds showed no signs of having been tampered with.

The intruder appeared satisfied.

"You have come back to your senses, have you? There should have been a rope around your legs, but it makes no difference now."

"Sure, an' it makes a hape av differens'. Av ye wa'd take off the wristlets it wa'd make a hape more."

"No doubt. Come forward and give an account of yourself. And no nonsense. I have you covered, and I mean business. What are you doing here?"

"Sittin' 'round in the darruk. Phat did yez think?"

"There is no joke about this. How did you get here?"

"Av I knew Oi'd tell yez, fast enough. I wor 'in a bit av a rucshun at Red John's, an'-an'-Oi wor' thinkin' Oi got out aloive, but mebbe O'im mistaken. The next thing Oi knew Oi wor' here."

"You're too deadly cool about it to be a square man. What took you into Red John's?"

"Sure, an' Oi heard the racket, an' wint to have a hand in. It wor' fun while it lashted, av Oi did kim out wi'd a sore head. Av yez wor' white ye'd be afther makin' me hands loose, an' talkin' after-words."

"Time enough when we get to the bottom of this. Who are you? What is your business?"

"O'im Buck Murtagh, from Bitter Crick, and in throuble wi'd the marshals. Oi wor' lookin' for a loikely layout, an', be the powers, Oi s'ame to have found it."

"Do you expect us to believe any such nonsense?"

"It's the truth, av I die for it!"

"Die you will, perhaps, for we know you only too well. You are a private detective from the Beamish Agency, and your name is Burns. Tell us straight what brought you down here, and it may be all the better for you."

"It can't be woorse," answered Burns,

with a shrug of his shoulders, and not at all discomfited.

"Perhaps; but it might certainly be worth your while. In case your mission should not interfere with us there will be no reason why we cannot turn you loose."

"An' av it does?"

"The ground here digs easy, and this place is never visited. In one corner you would rest well."

"Av that's your game Oi'll say nothin', an' you kin foind out the truth. Sure, an' wa'd ye convict me out av me own mouth?"

"You are convicted already. It's a question now of pardon."

"Sure, an' we had a bit av disecourse wanst befoore, an' how wor' that?"

In the cowed man before him Burns felt sure he recognized the fellow who had unmasked him at the saloon, and who Fly Billy had told him was known as Bob Knocker.

To tell him his business meant his own condemnation, and he took a sudden, desperate resolve.

The man stood on the plank, a foot or more from the ground, and the pistol no longer looked him squarely in the face.

With a sudden bound Burns sprang forward, lowering his head like a battering ram as he came, and caught his inquisitor squarely in the stomach, sending him to the floor with a crash.

Then he ran hastily up the plank, thrust away the temporary stairway, and pushed the trap into place with his foot.

CHAPTER XV.

THE "KNOCK-OUT DROPS."

Had his hands been loose Burns would have asked no better chance for escape.

He had a strong hope that his visitor was alone, and even if he had a companion or two the Irishman would have hoped, though bare-handed, to have held his own.

But, handicapped as he was, it was only a desperate chance he was taking. The room was thoroughly dark, and he could only guess from the remembrance of the footsteps above in which direction lay the door.

There was a muffled shout from the cellar, showing that at least he had not broken the neck of his visitor, and then, as he stood and listened, he heard a footstep in the room.

The man had not been alone, after all.

The best tactics for him to pursue were those he had tried in the cellar. He silently stepped to one side in search of the wall. When he had found it he followed it in the direction in which he hoped to find the door.

Careful though he was, he could not avoid the obstacles which he could not see, and before long he stumbled against a bench, and came near going full length on the floor.

He listened to learn if the accident had been noticed, and decided that it had.

Some one else had taken up the same game, and was advancing on him along the wall at a much faster rate than he could risk. Meantime the man in the cellar was thumping against the trap with the end of his plank, and it would only be a short time until there would, no doubt, be a light on the scene. Supposing, even, that he could reach the door, and should find it closed? Even a simple bolt could defy him now, with his hands helpless.

The steps behind came patting closer, but the door was nearer. He felt the casing with his shoulder, and knew he would learn his fate in a moment.

He took another step forward, and then—saw more stars than had ever been in view on the most cloudless of nights.

There were two men in the room, and one of them had been silently waiting for him at the door.

When his shoulder was just touching the panel the fist of this man shot out and knocked the detective down.

It was a good, solid blow, but it was not a knock-out. Having his wits well about him, Burns rolled to one side the moment he struck the floor. He knew he could not hope to do much else, unless by chance, but he meant to make the fray as interesting as possible while it lasted.

As it happened, he got out of the way of the two men, and the fellow who had been behind took his place. He imagined he had the detective before him, and fell forward tooth and nail upon his companion, jabbing him viciously with his fist, and then clutching him by throat and collar.

Silence was at a discount.

The two locked in and had a lively tussle in the dark. If the damage done had been equal to their intentions there would have been a couple of corpses on the floor. As it was, they managed to get in mutual work after a very fair fashion.

In the midst of it all the trap flew up and the cowed and cloaked man came bounding up from the cellar, his pistol in one hand, the lantern in the other.

One of the fellows had the other down, and by the first gleam of light managed to get in a thump which started a stream of claret flowing from his nose, and then banged his head down on the floor with a crash which made one's skull ache to hear.

"You infernal fools, what are you doing?" shouted the man with the lantern, springing forward, and giving the top man a rousing kick which actually hoisted him clear of the other, and sent him end over end out of the way, while at the same time he promptly covered Burns, who was fumbling at the door.

"Is this the way you keep a watch out? Get up here and attend to business."

"Youse bloody right, boss. It's a boss on us," said the fellow he had kicked, rising without a semblance of anger.

"What shall we do wi'd him?"

"Take him back, and see that he don't get away again. If the door had been open he would have been where the woodbine twineeth."

"How shell we take him, boss? Stiff or limber?"

The other fellow was up by this time, and had produced a knife, while he looked tigerishly at the prisoner, upon whom the full light of the lantern was turned. Any anger he might feel over the late unpleasant mistake would cheerfully have been taken out of him.

"Steady, there! You've made too much muss on the floor already. See that you clean it up afterward. If he won't go peaceably, knock him down and carry him."

"Och! Oi'm p'aceable enough," interposed Burns. "Av yez won't lit me lade O'im willin' to folly."

"Lead then, and see that you try no more tricks."

Burns went quietly down into the cellar, and was thinking a great deal as he went along.

These men were not as anxious to kill him as he had at first feared.

If they were interested parties to the murder of Harry Heathcote it might be they only wanted him cooped until they could either remove all traces of the murder or else get themselves out of the way.

He rather wished now that he had spoken fair, and not tried to pull wool over their eyes. With Fly Billy scouting near he would like nothing better than to be left alone in the cellar.

He also remembered the knife which stuck in the dirt under the window, and thought that even without the help of the boy he might make his escape. It was a disappointment when the man in the mask followed him down.

The barrel offered a sort of seat, and he propped himself up on it, waiting for what was to come next.

"You are a fool," said the man at length, peering at him from behind the mask with what seemed to be evil eyes.

"O'ive bi'n towld that same befoore, but it's the way Oi wor' born."

"You are looking for one Heathcote. A child could have told you this was not the way to find him. There are plenty of roads to Canada. Why have you not followed one of them? And here you are only stirring up men who would not care to harm you if they were sure of what you want."

"Av ye know it so well, whoy don't yez till thim?"

"That is nothing here nor there. The question is, whether we can get rid of you

without killing. Confound it, man! You can't do any good in the case you are on, and you are going to make us lots of trouble if we don't stifle you."

"An' a hape more av ye do."

Burns was not a man to be bluffed, though perhaps he might have acted differently if he had been approached in this way at first.

"Then there is nothing for you to do but remain here till the tide goes out."

"Sure, an' ye better sind me out now. By that toime me hands will be dhroppin' from me wrists. The blood's thricklin' down now."

"Uncomfortable, is it? Fast bind, fast find; but that might be helped. There's no use to torture you."

From under his robe the man produced a pair of handcuffs and snapped them over the wrists of the detective, below the cords, which he then removed.

Burns had gained little by calling attention to his hands. The knife on the floor would do him little good now.

"There is no use to make a noise. The two men will be above, and if you raise your voice they will club you senseless. Remain here till I return again."

The man in the mask went away, leaving Patrick Burns sitting on the end of his barrel, with the darkness thick around him.

"Av me mither's darlint could have mixed it worrse I wa'd loike to know."

The detective tried to laugh as he thought over his predicament, but it was not a laughing matter. The careless front he had put on had only made things worse.

He was evidently in the hands of desperate men, and the hint about the tide had not been lost on him.

More than one man had been found floating in the bay who had doubtless been cast adrift in the sewers. He was not so sure the words of the man in the mask were only an idle threat.

Fly Billy could help him but little now, even if he came again. The boy might call on the police for aid, but it was very doubtful if he would.

The gamin seemed to have a sympathy for the cut-throats, and probably a variance with the police. The chances were he had attracted their attention more than once, and if he came bothering the patrolman on that beat he would be told to move on, and the order emphasized with a club.

He had listened eagerly, and as well as he could make out the two men were still on guard, and it would be no use to shout. There was nothing for him to do but sit there and wait.

As the hours went by it really seemed as though he would go mad with the blackness and the silence and the loneliness of the cellar. He could not sleep. Wakefulness had come to him.

Hunger and thirst also came on him, and his imagination outran their present effect, and fancy told him he was left there to starve. It was a very wretched time he had of it, and it is hard to tell whether he was more surprised or delighted when the trap door opened and his jailers appeared, bringing him a rough dinner of bread and meat, and a jug of cold coffee.

He was in hopes they would release his hands so that he could feed himself, but in that he was disappointed.

"Sorry, boss, but couldn't think of it. Wisht we could, but youse got ter take it dis way er not at all."

While one of them held the lantern the other began to feed the prisoner.

Burns was entirely too much gnawed by his appetite to seriously object. He ate ravenously, and when the jug was put to his lips gulped down the contents in great draughts, though it was not by any means as sweet tasted as under other circumstances he would have wished for.

In fact, it had a singular taste, or else there was something in the food which left a peculiar flavor in his mouth.

But he had been fasting since early the night before, and it was now long after noon. He did not stop to consider the meaning of it.

The fellow watched him with a covert grin.

"Better lie down and take a snooze," he said, not altogether roughly.

"Der boss won't be here afore night, an' it's der best way ter put in d'e time. We'll leave yer de lantern dis time. We got anodder."

Burns somehow felt like taking the advice when he was once more left alone.

He let himself down on the ground, curled himself up into as comfortable a position as he could, and wearily closed his eyes.

In a minute he seemed to be asleep, in perhaps five more the trap opened again and the face of one of the guards could be seen peering down at the recumbent man.

"Stiff as a poker," he said, after a close survey, and came slowly down the plank, followed by his companion.

Burns never moved, though one of the men took his arm and shook it gently.

"Git a move on, cully; he's ready for d'e trip."

He looked at his companion, who moved to one side of the cellar.

The wall there did not seem different from the wall at any other point, but he reached down and pressed what must have been a concealed spring.

Then he pushed, and a section swung back, revealing a narrow passage.

Between them the two men caught up the insensible detective and bore him into the passage. When they had gone through the door swung slowly back.

CHAPTER XVI.

NORAH'S NEWS.

Several days had gone by since Patrick Burns called at the Havercamp mansion, and meantime nothing had been heard from him there.

Havercamp himself seemed to take the silence without being worried, but after a day of unconcern, his daughter began to show signs of trouble.

"There is something strange about it, Norah."

She spoke to her maid after the manner of a friend and confidant, and the blue eyes of Miss Norah turned on her full of sympathy as she answered:

"They say it is better to be born lucky than rich, and I am almost certain it is so."

"Well?"

The expression of opinion seemed irrelevant, but Norah seldom spoke without a meaning.

"Since the gentleman called, finding he was to be more or less mixed up with us, I took the trouble to make some inquiries in regard to him."

"And, pray, where did you make inquiry?"

"Do you think I have no friends of my own?" asked the young lady, with a saucy toss of her head.

"You must remember that if I am not the rose, I live very near it, and when I cast my eyes in any direction there is always some one willing to be influenced by the glance."

Miss Helen was willing to smile herself. She had every confidence in Norah, but she knew her thoroughly, and that she was not exaggerating.

"So you are going to have another little mystery, are you? Never mind. Explain what you meant by your remark."

"Indeed, it is no mystery, and I don't want to deceive you. The truth is, I have been interviewed myself, though cautiously, and I suspect I gained more information than I gave."

"I hope so. Who was the interviewer?"

"One of his brother detectives. I had seen him before, and knew him in a minute, though, of course, I never let on."

"And he?"

"Oh, he was just as reserved. If you could have seen us you would have sworn there was the grandest flirtation of the season going on between us."

"How, then, did you get your information?"

"Made the dear boy jealous by praising a lad who had called at the house not long ago and asked me the questions he proposed. I asked him if it was a brother."

"Neither of you seems to have been very

guarded in your talk, for a pair of strangers."

"That's the privilege of my place. I managed him just too nicely, and it wasn't long before he was off the wheel and had lost his tire. He told me all about Mr. Burns, and so I knew what I was saying when I remarked that it was better to be born lucky than rich. Mr. Burns was born lucky."

"Then, you think?"

"That he will ferret out the mystery, and that it will all have a good ending."

"It is a consolation to hear a good report of the detective, for I own I was not particularly favorably impressed."

"When it comes to that, I don't know that the report was so favorable. I should judge the gentlemen do not admire each other any too much, but from what I made out my gallant countryman has always had the luck to be successful, whether he showed judgment or not."

"Oh!"

"And his blundering luck has made him the envy, if not the admiration of his associates."

"And that is the sort of man to whom we are entrusting perhaps the life itself of Harry. I begin to believe they have sent us a figurehead to look at while a more competent man is really investigating the case."

"So much the better—if they have him. As for me, I will trust to my handsome Irishman, and if you are wise you will do the same. You will hear from him before long. I feel it in my nerves."

"I hope so, for, really, I cannot stand the suspense much longer. I feel as though I must do something myself. And yet, what can I do but wait for some development at home? The suspense is awful. Norah, it is killing me."

"Sure, and if you put a bold front on it won't kill you a bit faster than old age, and that is a long way off. Trust to Providence and our friend the detective to tide us over the present trouble, and you'll see it will all come right in the end."

"I wish I was as certain as you seem to feel. I wish, even, that I knew what might be the worst. If I was ready for it I would feel that I was able to face it when it came."

"Why not ask your father what he thinks of it?"

"I dare not. There is a mystery behind it all that I cannot fathom, and which he will not reveal, though he has hinted it exists. Strange he does not trust me more fully."

"And it is connected with Harry Heathcote?"

"It must be, though how closely I cannot guess. This I will do. I will stake my life on the honor of my father and the innocence from any crime of my young friend."

At the word friend Norah's eyes twinkled, a smile came to her lips.

She knew what friend meant to Helen Havercamp when she spoke in the same breath of the missing cashier.

"That goes without saying. But it strikes me Master Harry was very chary of his words, or he might have given a hint then that would have relieved your mind now."

"How could he know that it would be needed? It has all been so unexpected. Why, we had an engagement together for this very evening."

"Then, if I wor' you, I would keep it."

Helen looked at her confidant in almost a dazed manner.

"You do not mean to say you expect Harry will return by that time?"

"Oh, no."

"Then, how can I?"

"You can keep your side of it."

"But, what good will that do?"

"Who knows? If Mr. Heathcote should turn up, what more likely than that he would look for you at Mrs. Broadalbin's?"

"You are entirely too hopeful. And, yet, you are right. I would hardly care to send my excuses at this late hour, and I promised Jeannette faithfully to be there. I had forgotten it entirely until it came to my mind just now."

"At any rate, it would never do to mope at home just now. Your father will be good for escort duty, and who knows what may happen? You will be ready for it, now, and whatever it may be I know you will not be thrown off your dignity. Fortunately you did not forget to speak of it last week, and everything will be ready."

"I will go, though there are reasons why I would never have given my word if I had not expected to have Harry with me as an escort."

"As a guard, more likely. You are afraid to meet a certain gentleman who will have a fair field—and very little favor—while Heathcote is out of the way."

The guess was a shrewd one, and Helen flushed under it, but waved her hand and said nothing. That was a matter which just now she did not care to discuss, even with Norah. At any unpleasant risk, she had decided Mrs. Broadalbin was to have her as a guest that evening.

Mr. Havercamp most likely had some other arrangements of his own, for though he had been included in the invitation, it was not likely he had any intention of accepting. It was important that Helen should see him in time, for she knew that while even at the last moment she could induce him to go, yet it might be at some sacrifice which she could spare him.

A word or two into the telephone ordered the carriage for her, and by the time it arrived she was ready for the street.

As she came out she saw there were several passers, and one or two persons lingering near.

Of the latter, one was a ridiculous looking boy, who seemed to be on very good terms with himself.

He was dressed in cast-off clothing which was still in a fair state of preservation, though originally designed for a full grown man.

In his hand he held a small bundle of pencils, and over his arm was a roll of cheap suspenders.

He touched his hat with some grace, and his little, brown eyes twinkled as he stepped back a pace, so that he did not directly block her path.

"Only a nickel, mum," he chirruped, as enough, holding up the bundle, but in a lower voice he swiftly added:

"Be youse Miss Havercamp?"

It was a new experience to the young lady, but being surrounded with trouble and a mystery she had been learning fast.

She nodded slightly as an answer to the last question, and smiled as she answered aloud:

"How ridiculous! And yet, I certainly will."

"Only a nickle, mum," he chirruped, as he saw the young lady searching for some small change, and in lower tones he added:

"Keep d'e paper, miss, d'ere's writin' on it."

Wrapped around the pencil which he extended was a bit of paper, and Helen's fingers closed upon it and pencil as she extended the nickel with the other hand.

"Sold ag'in, an' anodder soul made happy!" laughed the boy, with a parting wave of the hand, while Helen tripped down and into the carriage in a tremor of suspense.

This paper, no doubt, meant news of some kind. What would its purport be?

Leaning back on the cushions, she waited until out of sight of any spectator who might have seen the transaction.

Then the little paper was furtively unrolled, and its contents read.

It was very brief as a letter, but, if there was no mistake about it, very explicit.

"Be on your guard, and if you see me soon, do not recognize me under any circumstances."

The writing was unfamiliar, and hastily scrawled with a lead pencil, but Helen felt sure there was but one person from whom it could come.

She went down to see her father in a radiant mood. He hardly recognized her as the same dismal-faced young lady from whom he had silently parted at the breakfast table.

She captured him without delay.

"Consider yourself on duty, sir, for to-night. I shall need you as an escort to Mrs. Broadalbin's."

"If it must be, it must," he answered, with something like a sigh.

"I am rather old for such frivolity, but if you are not ashamed of your old father I will try and take the post I ought to be leaving to a younger man."

"The younger man is not on the carpet, but if he comes, and is the right one besides, I shall relieve you. Who knows?"

Havercamp looked at his daughter sharply, but she only smiled and waved her hand airily as she floated away. She meant to give no reasons for her request, or even hint at what might be on the cards to happen. As she went home she had time to think it all over, and she wished now that she could have interrogated the boy.

She even looked around to see if by any chance he might still be in sight.

But Fly Billy had disappeared as soon as his errand had been performed, though on his way he had been accosting every one he met with a request to purchase his wares.

She showed the note to Norah, and of course talked over what its meaning might be.

"It must be from Harry, and it tells me he is still alive."

"So you think," retorted Norah; "but supposing it was from our Irish friend? That seems a good deal more likely."

"I do not see why. He would hardly expect me to recognize him if he came in questionable shape."

"Dear knows what a woman would do. All I can see to do is to wait till he comes, and if it should turn out to be 'nayther av us,' it will probably be some one else."

"You cannot discourage me. I shall expect to see him soon, and if I happen to be at Mrs. Broadalbin's when he comes, remember his request, but send for me there."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CRUSH AT THE BROADALBIN'S.

The gathering at Mrs. Broadalbin's was a regular crush, and surpassed even the wildest hopes of that eminently fashionable lady.

She had formulated a plan for an amalgamation of social shades, and the end justified her wishes.

She had numerous representations from the exclusive Four Hundred, who found themselves there somewhat to their own surprise, though enjoying themselves hugely. Mrs. Broadalbin was wealthy, beautiful and witty, but she was not strictly of their set.

Then, there were strong representatives from the world of letters, men and women of celebrity, and even chiefs in newspaperdom.

Back of them all were the peers of finance, like Peter Havercamp, who represented wealth and the self-made American.

Yet, somehow, the hostess moulded her elements into a homogeneous mass, and her party was a decided "go."

Miss Helen enjoyed herself. She was not only an heiress, but a belle; and though rather of the queenly sort, was capable of a good deal of condescension in an affair like this.

In making other people happy she did a like service to herself, and for the moment almost forgot the hidden trouble which had been eating her heart out.

Mr. Havercamp also appeared at his best. He found some congenial spirits who seconded his efforts, and there was a great deal of laughter from the corner of the room which they occupied.

In the course of the evening a strange face attracted Helen's attention.

Mr. Grimsby went by, listening delightedly to a lady who seemed to be very amusing. She was tall, and of a style of beauty much resembling Helen's, though more matured. Though fully occupying the attention of the worthy director, she found time to shoot glances out in various directions, and it so happened that the eyes of the two met.

Helen was conscious of a peculiar feeling, which she mentally traced to the stranger. Without knowing why, she asked some one about her.

The some one happened to be a newspaper man, and was happy to give her all the information in his power.

The lady was a Mrs. Ferrand, wealthy, and a widow. She was also, without a doubt, the author of the novel "Effete Ethics," which was exciting so much attention, though published anonymously. Only a few of them were in the secret, and he hoped Miss Havercamp would not betray the confidence until the name was officially announced, as it would be on the twenty-fifth edition.

Helen had heard of "Effete Ethics," which was a novel somewhat on the "Yellow Book" lines, a style she did not admire; but it was up to date, and having a tremendous run.

The author of such a work must be a mental curiosity, and probably a moral one. Miss Havercamp had some desire to know more about her, since she had come under her observation; and wondered how she came to be a guest of Mrs. Broadalbin.

The literary gentleman's stock of information, however, was exhausted, and she was not sufficiently interested to ask questions of her hostess. Had it not been for what seemed a chance she would probably have dropped the stranger altogether from her thoughts.

So far nothing had been seen of Harry Heathcote, and she had not even heard his name mentioned. It was the wildest nonsense, she admitted to herself, to ever think he would be here. At rather an early hour she gave a covert signal to her father.

She wished to speak with him, and shortly after to return home. Dropping into a corner she waited; and instead of Peter Havercamp, Mrs. Ferrand came.

In spite of all the modern resources in ventilation, the rooms were a trifle warm for comfort, and the widow dropped into a seat near to Helen in a semi-exhausted condition and began to fan herself gracefully.

The two looked at each other, then spoke, and then glided into a conversation. Each knew the name of the other and there was nothing awkward about the situation, though the younger lady was not yearning for a tete-a-tete.

She was conscious of a keen inspection, though it was made in a guarded way, and at once gave Mrs. Ferrand the credit of being a more than ordinary woman, though in what direction she could not as yet say.

"You are tired?"

Apropos of nothing Mrs. Ferrand made the remark, and Helen admitted that she was.

"So am I; but then, I am older, and of late not used to this sort of thing. I hardly know why I came."

"Probably as a religious observance?"

"Probably because it was so foreordained. I know of no other reason which could have operated under the circumstances."

"Then you must be weary, or you would not be throwing the blame on fate."

Nothing very brilliant about this, but it opened the conversation. After a little Mrs. Ferrand remarked:

"There seems to have been quite a mysterious disappearance at the bank. I wonder it has not been more talked of."

"I suppose I know to what you allude, but I assure it is not considered a case of disappearance at all by those of us who are acquainted with the absent gentleman."

"Indeed! From what Mr. Grimsby told me I supposed it was known as an open secret."

"If you allude to Mr. Heathcote, I must say I was not aware there was any kind of secret concerning him."

Mrs. Ferrand raised her eyebrows, and looked sympathizingly at her vis-a-vis.

"I hardly know what to call it, then. Possibly the young man was a personal acquaintance of yours. Possibly, also, you have not heard the latest rumor. Mr.

Grimsby spoke of it, and he only heard it a short time ago."

"I knew the gentleman; and I have heard nothing in regard to him for some time."

There was question in her eyes, and the voice of Mrs. Ferrand sank lower yet.

"Can you stand a shock?"

"As well as the most. Speak."

"It is only a theory, and there has been no time to demonstrate whether it is correct or not. That will have to be left until to-morrow."

"Well?"

"The body of a young and unknown man was found in a load of refuse matter in a scow, where it seemed to have been placed Saturday night. As yet, it has not been identified, and it seems there may be some trouble about doing that, but Mr. Grimsby intends to look at the clothing to-morrow."

"For Heaven's sake!"

Helen grew white to her lips, and it seemed as though she must faint. The question she would have asked remained unspoken.

It was only for a moment.

Then, by a mighty effort, she recovered her self-possession, and something of the color came back to her face.

"Do not think I have told you this to hurt you. I had reason to believe it would be told you this evening, and perhaps even more brutally than I have done it. It was better you should have your shock where the world could not see it."

And furtively Mrs. Ferrand passed over a smelling bottle, at the same time drawing more in front of Helen.

"But you do not believe the story; or, at least, that by any possibility it can be the body of Mr. Heathcote?"

"I cannot say that I believe anything in the matter, since I have not seen it with my own eyes; but I feel sure it would be better for you to believe him dead. My intuitions are telling me he is; and they seldom go wrong."

"And mine convince me he is still alive."

"Retain that hope, then; and so firmly that nothing can shake it before all these people. Believe me, I am more interested in you than you dream of, and I wish I could be more explicit."

"You have said enough, Heaven knows! Now, if you will only forget that we ever discussed this subject I will feel myself your debtor still more, since I acknowledge that if I was to hear of it at all it was better the knowledge came to me in the way it did."

"Rest assured that I will not reopen the subject; and, for my last words, allow me to say that, in all human probability, Harry Heathcote is dead. I have reasons for saying so which, if needed, I may give to you at another time. Good evening."

Mrs. Ferrand arose and moved away.

Helen sat dumbly watching her.

In spite of the hopes raised by the note given her by the boy, and which had not entirely left her, she could not help but be impressed by the tone of conviction in those parting words.

She recovered rapidly from the shock, however, and when, a little later, her father came up, with a troubled look on his face, she was not slow to catch its meaning, nor was she overwhelmed by it.

"I know, but I do not believe. Say not another word about it."

"It is a shock, nevertheless, whether true or false. If you are willing to leave I believe I would prefer to go home."

"I am ready."

She took her father's arm. As they went along he asked a question on the very subject they had just agreed to drop.

"How did you come to hear? I was in hopes you would be spared until I could break it to you. I know your interest, and blame myself."

There was something strange in what the banker said, but his daughter did not allow herself to show she noted it, and only answered the part which was the question.

The intelligence came from Mr. Grimsby; but it reached me through a comparative stranger, a Mrs. Ferrand."

"Mrs. Ferrand! Who is she?"

"I know little of her except that she seems to be a friend of Mr. Grimsby, and is supposed to be one of the new school of writers. A brilliant woman, if I am not mistaken—and yonder she is."

The lady under discussion was on the other side of the room, but standing so that a fair view could be obtained of her face.

Havercamp looked, turned away, and then looked again.

His arm closed like a vise upon the hand of his daughter, and glancing into his face she saw that he had suddenly become paler even than she had felt herself a short time before.

In his eyes, too, there was a look of what might well be interpreted as horror. Without a word he drew her away. The withdrawal became, not a retreat, but a panic.

It is extremely doubtful if Mrs. Broadbain ever knew when the Havercamps left, for they never halted—save to don hats and wraps—until they found themselves in the carriage.

Even then there was no conversation, for Mr. Havercamp, leaning back, muttered:

"Do not speak. I must have time to think."

Here was another mystery. Helen forgot, or almost forgot, Harry Heathcote for the moment, while wondering what was the meaning of this.

What was this woman to her father? What was she to Helen herself?

There had not seemed anything strange in the conversation with her, at the time; but now it took on another aspect, and she began to fancy that perhaps Mrs. Ferrand knew more of the affairs of the Havercamp family than had been suspected.

Her parting words came back with more and more force. There was a hint in them of revelations to come, and a promise the two were to meet again.

It seemed the wildest nonsense to believe that this stranger had information which the rest of the world had failed to obtain, yet Helen was beginning to believe it, and in spite of his command she would have spoken to her father had there not come a startling occurrence, which for the time drove all thoughts of Harry Heathcote and Madame Ferrand out of her head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

The speed of the horses had suddenly become accelerated to an alarming degree, and there was little doubt but what they were running away.

There had been no apparent cause for any such catastrophe, and either the driver had been guilty of gross carelessness or something had happened to him.

This was the first thought of Helen Havercamp when she came to realize the situation, though, in fact, the horses had been for some little time going at a faster pace than the coachman usually allowed in a night drive.

Havercamp would no doubt have failed to notice what was happening, had not his daughter called him to himself by a clutch on his arm.

"See!" she said. "Thomas is either drunk or crazy. The horses are away with him."

Thomas was neither drunk nor crazy; but the lines had dropped from his hands, and he was huddled up in one corner, senseless and inert, like a man who had been struck with apoplexy.

The banker came to himself with a start, and, leaning forward, called to Thomas.

There was no answer, and if anything the horses went faster than before.

Fortunately, at that hour of the night the streets were comparatively deserted, and unless they came in contact with some desultory cab or some carriage returning from the theaters or social affairs, there was little danger of a collision.

The greatest danger would probably be when they came to the banker's house.

Until then they would be apt to keep the straight road; but there they might be expected to turn the corner, and keep on to the stables. If the carriage was not wrecked against the lamp-post it would be a mercy.

Several pedestrians saw them at the moment they rolled by, and called after them, but had no time to try to stop the swiftly running steeds; and as they neared the Havercamp mansion the pace became wilder and wilder.

Helen remained seated, with her hands nervously clasped. She was too wise to throw herself from the vehicle; and if she screamed ever so loud it would do no good.

Nevertheless, she was cool enough to watch the street as it slipped by her, and she saw a man suddenly spring out from the sidewalk at a point a little in advance, and dash toward the coming conveyance.

He made no outcry, nor did he seem to try to check the horses; but as it reached him he sprang forward, with a mighty bound and landed fairly on the seat of the carriage.

Fortunately, the lines had never been drawn over the dash, and to catch them up was the work of but a second.

Then, throwing himself back, the man wrapped them hastily around his wrists, and, speaking in a low, even tone, he gave a strong pull, and began sawing steadily on the mouths of the excited animals.

He could not expect to check their speed with any great suddenness, nor did he try; but the work he was doing was gradually bringing them under control. As they neared the turning point they swept away from it rather than toward the dangerous post, and a little farther on, came from a fast trot to a sudden standstill.

At the shock, comparatively mild though it was, Thomas slipped off the seat and lay in a huddled heap on the floor, while the stranger, without hesitation, leaped down and stood respectfully by the side of the carriage.

"Here you are, sir; all right up to the present time. Let me help the lady out!"

It happened that the banker was the nearer to the pavement, and he did not wait for Helen, but got out hastily, turning then, to assist his daughter.

All of them seemed unconscious of a little knot of men lurking in the shadows.

"It didn't connect, but down 'em anyway," growled a hoarse voice, which scarcely reached their ears, and immediately afterward there came a rush.

It was an attack—of that there could be no doubt—and was so totally unexpected that there would have been no blame to Peter Havercamp if he had been altogether taken off his guard. He heard the voice, however, and wheeled at once, even though he had not thoroughly distinguished the words.

At the same instant the stranger who had so opportunely come to his aid wheeled also, and with hands well up, darted forward, hitting as he went.

The movement was so sudden that he was in the midst of the gang, working away right and left, before they had time to recognize that this was not the respectable nonentity who officiated as Havercamp's coachman.

The hard knocks he gave opened their eyes, and they started in to return in kind.

That was not so easy to do.

The man danced this way and that, shifting his head about to dodge the blows aimed at him, and meantime, though the assailants were gluttons for punishment, kept one after another staggering back from the strokes he landed.

One or two were fairly stretched out, and when they crawled to their feet again they were decidedly groggy, and hardly able to take further part in the riot.

But with one man only against half a dozen, this thing could not go on for ever.

A chance blow knocked the gallant defender of the Havercamps off his feet.

But at the same time Peter Havercamp faced them with a pistol in his hand.

"Away, there!" he exclaimed, sternly. "Linger here a minute longer and I fire."

The threat of itself might not have proved effectual had it not been supplemented by the approach of a policeman, who fortunately had been attracted thither by the whirling carriage.

He had been sure there was something wrong, and fancied it might be money in his pocket if he could furnish any assistance to the millionaire banker. When he got to the lamp-post he saw there was something more in the adventure than he had counted on, and giving a signal hastened in the direction of the fray.

"Howld on there, ye spalpeens! Oi'll run ye all in av yez stroikes anither blow."

The warning had the effect for which it was probably intended. Policeman McGuire was none too anxious to tackle a crowd like this all by himself.

"D'e game's up, scuttle ye'r nibs!" exclaimed one of the gang; and without delay they broke away, dragging one of their number among them.

As the officer came up the champion of the banker was just regaining his feet, and his head made a fair-looking mark. Policeman McGuire swung his club, and had it not been for Peter Havercamp would have let drive.

"Stop, stop, officer! You are after the wrong man. There go the villains. This is a friend."

He was barely in time to save trouble.

McGuire appeared to be in doubt, but a second order, more peremptory than ever, caused him to put away his club, though he looked hesitatingly at the man who scrambled up and threw himself on guard.

"Yez wor' shure this wor' not wan av the sandbaggin' p'irates?" he asked, eyeing the stranger with what seemed growing suspicion.

"The pirates are around the corner and a block away by this time. See if you can find out anything more about them. It will be money in your pocket if you can locate them."

"Av Oi had been here a momint sooner it's in the station Oi wa'd have been afther locatin' thim. Thanks, sor. Oi will do my bish."

He broke off in his speech because Havercamp had interrupted by tipping him what in police parlance was "the glad hand."

The cordiality of the shake was greatly enhanced by the size of the coin which the banker left in his palm, and he clattered off in pursuit of the men, though without the least idea of ever seeing them again.

Through the whole affair Miss Helen had retained her composure.

When the banker turned to her he found she was staring curiously at their rescuer, but not saying a word.

He thought nothing of that, however; though he was not long silent himself.

"My friend, you have done us a double service which I do not intend to forget. If I do not express my thanks sufficiently well to-night I will try to do it to-morrow, when I shall expect to see you again."

"Say no more about it. It was just a lucky chance."

"It was considerably more than a chance. Not one man in ten thousand could have served me as well. It is the first time I ever had a complaint to make about Thomas, but it will be the last. He came too near to sacrificing our lives to trust him again."

"Perhaps Thomas was not as near to being in fault as you think."

"What can you mean?"

"I suspect that in some way he was drugged. He is not the sort to faint because his horses got away."

"Drugged! Surely you are mistaken."

"Look at him and see."

Thomas still lay in the huddle where he had been thrust, and the two men dragged him down.

He was breathing heavily, and limp as

a drunken man, but at a glance Havercamp saw there was truth in the stranger's supposition.

"What shall we do with him?" asked the banker, more abroad at this discovery than he had yet been.

"That depends. If you want to keep this thing quiet—for there seems to be something of a mystery about it—we had better carry him in, and then send one of your servants quietly for a doctor, if you can't telephone. I can then put away the horses if you will show or tell me where."

"Thanks. I ought not to impose on you, but I will make it worth your while."

"No imposition. I'm on the streets this time of night because I've no better place to go. I was looking for a job for a week, but they're hard to find. Last boss bustled and left me in the cold. See?"

"Then I can offer you work. For to-night you can take care of Thomas, and to-morrow we will see where to place you. Now take hold."

Havercamp was still a vigorous man, and abundantly able to carry his end of the unfortunate coachman. Between them the two bore him in and up the stairway leading to his room above the stables, while Helen watched the horses.

Then the stranger took the team to its stalls, the doctor was summoned, and to the outside world quiet settled on the Havercamp residence.

Only in her own room Helen was saying to herself, "I was to recognize him under no circumstances. What does it mean?"

CHAPTER XIX.

FLY BILLY COMES ON DECK.

When the two ruffians picked up the insensible detective there was no one watching them directly, but there was somebody who was listening a great deal.

Fly Billy had vanooosed the ranch when he heard footsteps approaching, and had not been sure he had done it without being seen.

This made him doubly cautious, and when he discovered there was a man in sight shortly afterward, who appeared to be posted as a sentinel to watch the rear of the building, he gave it up for the time being.

He had other things to attend to, moreover, and though he thought over the situation a good deal, a number of hours passed before he returned to the charge.

But, finally, the man in the cellar troubled him more and more, the coast appeared to be clear, and he slunk around under cover of the house until he reached the shutter pried loose the previous night.

He was just in time to hear one of the men below say the detective was ready for the trip. After that, at any risk he felt he must have a peep; and he softly removed one corner of the shutter and peered down.

The view he had was none of the best, but he caught a glimpse of the two men carrying away a body between them, and he leaned still farther forward, his little eyes dilating as he saw them passing through what seemed to be the solid wall.

"I got ter see more ov this ef it takes me to ther boneyard," he thought, as he removed the shutter sufficiently to crawl into the frame of the window.

He listened while he carefully adjusted the board behind him, and then slipped silently to the bottom of the cellar.

The lantern which had been left with the prisoner still burned on the floor, and though it was a poor substitute for the daylight he had just left, Billy found no trouble in hitting the hidden door. By some oversight it had not altogether closed.

The thing looked so much like a trap the boy hesitated to go farther. He was something of a rat himself.

He looked in, however, and saw a narrow passage extending back into the darkness. Where it went to he could not even guess, and was afraid to attempt to explore. He listened for some time, and at length thought he heard returning footsteps.

They were nearer than he wanted them,

and there was little time for retreat. He closed the door hastily, and his eyes lit on the barrel.

A swift examination showed there was only one head to it, and under he went like a flash. It was running a decided risk, but it was as well to be caught there as climbing out of the window.

The men came into the cellar and closed the secret door behind them.

"Heap er use in d'at," said one of them. "D'e word come straight, but ef d'e Knocker didn't want ter t'row off on d'e orders, s' 'elp me."

"D'e Knocker better watch out er dey'll give d'e word on him. He's gittin' too high toned."

"He's gittin' too blamed tender skinned."

"More like he wants to t'row off on d'e gang. Ef d'e cop hed b'in on d'e make he'd 'a' sold him der 'hull plant."

"Better stow d'at sort o' patter. You t'ink so 'cause he give yer a h'iste w'id his beater. Ef he'd 'a' loaned ye a case you'd b'in a swearin' by him."

"D'at's right; but d'is way I'm free ter patter. D'ey said, put him in d'e drain; an' he lef' him in d'e cellar. An' you kin bet d'ere's goin' ter be a riot ef he kicks when he finds out how d'e land lays."

"D'at's right; an' he'll h'iste ye ag'in. D'at's what youse here for."

The two men did not appear to be in a good humor, and so were near the quarreling point with each other. One of them gave a casual kick at the barrel under which Fly Billy was hiding, and it wobbled about as though it would topple over. If the boy had not put forth all his strength it would have been tilted up, and he would have been disclosed.

The danger went by, however. The two men left the cellar and the boy heard their steps overhead. He waited a few minutes until he felt sure they would not soon return, and then crawled out from his place of concealment.

The conversation he had heard made him feel very serious. It was not hard to understand.

The original intention had been to murder the detective—and though a little respite had been given him, it was now most likely the plan had been taken up again and carried out. If he wanted to find the Irishman he would probably have to look for him "in the drain."

Was it worth while to run the risk?

Billy scratched his head, cocked his ear to one side, to listen for sounds from above, and then approached the wall. A great deal would depend on whether he succeeded in mastering the mechanism of the hidden door.

One point in his favor was that he knew right where to find it. He pushed and felt by turns. Finally the way opened, and with hesitating steps he began to advance.

Finally he reached what seemed to be the end of the passage. He bumped up against it in great shape.

A little investigation showed that it was a door fastened with a bolt.

He got it open without much trouble, and then lit a match to make sure what lay behind it.

First off he thought it was an open grave, but a second look showed him a pit; and in the bottom of it, lying as it had fallen, was the body of the detective.

The place was a trap, and no mistake. At the lower end was a grating, and there was a foul and musty smell.

"It's d'e water frum d'e bay, an' I wouldn't wonder ef d'e tide wos risin' right now. I'll hev' ter yank him out of d'at, but it's a corntrack."

Billy did not believe his man was dead, but if he had thought ever so much that he was, his course would probably have been the same.

It was a ghastly sort of work, but he did not intend to leave the body there to be turned adrift with the tide.

The hole was not so deep that he would have any trouble about getting out of it again, and with a nerve that was remarkable he scrambled down and bent over the detective.

The body was warm yet, at any rate. Unless he was badly mistaken, the man was still living.

The boy wasted no time. He was in a nervous tremor, in spite of his courage, and knew that in the darkness of the pit he could do this senseless being no good.

He got a hold around the body, and tugged and lifted.

The body showed a disgusting tendency to flop over and squirm out of his grasp. He never realized what a job he had before him until he had tried his hand at it for several minutes without success.

But he got his knee under the body, worked it up a little higher, until he could use his shoulder, and finally, after several failures, succeeded in fairly rolling the body out of the ditch.

Then he scrambled out himself.

There was one blessing Billy had to be thankful for without knowing it.

The men had so thoroughly relied upon the effects of the drug that they had removed the handcuffs from the wrists of their prisoner.

"Kin I er can't I?" queried the lad, as, bending down with a lighted match once more in his fingers, he inspected the senseless man.

"They must 'a' run short on their dope, for he ain't more ner half hoesussed. Shoot me livers, but I believe he's comin' 'round now."

The boy had a sensitive nose and a quick eye. He distinguished the scent of the drug, and detected a slight movement, as though his harsh handling had disturbed the man somewhat in his sleep.

This was no place for him to linger, however, and hard though it was to do, he managed to drag Burns back again into the cellar.

There, with the window right above his head, so that he could retreat the moment there was a sign of intrusion, Fly Billy began a course of treatment which fortunately seemed able to reach the case.

He had no antidotes, and dared not use his voice, but there remained to him fists and feet, and these he used after a fashion he thought would help the case.

He kicked, he beat, he pounded.

Now and then he whispered into the ear of the detective, but for the most part he trusted to his muscle.

So, effectually did his attentions operate that before long there were actually symptoms of revival.

After that the good work went on without cessation, though much to the disgust of the half-awakened man.

In the end Billy triumphed. Patrick Burns sat up and stared wearily around him in the blackness of the cellar, and the boy prudently dodged back out of reach.

"Howly Moses! Where am Oi?"

"Stow yer whist, pard. Youse in d'e wit, but Fly Billy's 'round ter rub youse out, soon ez youse gits O. K."

The voice of the boy sounded familiar, and Burns made a strong effort to control his thoughts, which had evidently gone wool-gathering.

Presently he remembered everything, and also discovered that his hands were free.

How that last came about he was not able to explain, but gave the credit of it to the boy, and let it go at that. It was more important to know how to get out of this prison where he had been caged for the best part of a day.

Billy was in mortal terror lest the cellar would have visitors before Burns would be in condition to move, but fortune favored them.

They were left unmolested, until such time as the detective, stretching his limbs, declared he was ready for an effort.

Then the boy led the way, and they crept out into the night which had again settled down upon the Empire City.

Burns had no desire for immediate work in the neighborhood. The strain had taken more out of him than he knew, until he was stumbling along the sidewalks, and rest in safety was the one thing he yearned for.

He gave the lad the location of his quarters, and then trusted to his guidance.

How he got there he hardly knew, but he arrived in safety and threw himself on his bed.

When he awoke again, the morning sun was shining brightly, and Fly Billy was lying sound asleep on the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ROUNDS.

The presence of the boy was at first a mystery, but Billy had a glib tongue, and when once awakened explained matters in a hurry.

What had seemed a nightmare resolved itself into a remembrance, and the detective was once more himself.

The boy interested him on his own account.

Seen by daylight, he had a bright face and a sturdy figure, which only needed the better clothes the grateful detective mentally promised to make him decidedly presentable.

Until this case was over, gratitude or no gratitude, it was hardly advisable to take him out of the lair in Lannigan's cellar. His assistance among the slums would be invaluable if his good faith could be relied upon. They had some talk together on various subjects, and then Billy departed.

Burns certainly had received important intelligence, and debated within himself whether to report first at headquarters or call at the Havercamps.

After a little consideration he chose the latter. He took breakfast on the way, and reached the residence of the banker, as he supposed in time to meet Havercamp before he should start out for the bank.

In this he was barely successful, as he met the banker at the steps, just on the point of leaving home.

He recognized the detective at once, since Burns wore the same suit he had on at his previous call, and very willingly returned to the room where the two had once before held an interview.

"Well, sir, what news?" asked the banker, as the two took chairs.

"Have you succeeded in finding out anything as to where Heathcote went?"

"I believe I have, though it is at second hand."

"Do you allude to the matter in the paper?"

"Cannot say, since I have seen no paper for several mornings. Perhaps that is later intelligence than I have to give you."

"Perhaps; and yet it is just as uncertain whether it is intelligence at all. It is only a suspicion on my part, and, I may add, on the part of others."

"From what?"

"From the finding of the body of a murdered man among rubbish on a dumping scow."

"Have you seen the body?"

"Not as yet, but I expect to visit it in the course of the day."

"The paper does not say, then, that it is supposed to be the corpse of your cashier?"

"No, sir."

"Then I may say that, without knowing anything about the finding of the body, since I have heard of it, I should be inclined to believe it is really Heathcote's."

"In Heaven's name, why?"

"Because I have heard a story, so strange I hesitated to believe it, but this would fit in and prove the proper culmination."

"Heathcote was connected with the story?"

"I believed that he was, if the thing was entitled to any credence at all."

"It seems strange you should speak so doubtfully, yet appear to put so much faith in it."

"My informant was a boy whom I accidentally stumbled on in the dangerous regions of the city. He was a veritable vagabond, more or less connected with the criminals of whom he spoke, and his conversation was a strange mixture of thieves' slang and the dialect of the Bowery."

"Yet you seem to have trusted him somewhat."

"He did his work without any need of trusting him. I veritably believe he saved my life twice over, and I am not going to forget it."

"Your life?"

"Yes. From the determined way in which it was assaulted I know I am on the brink of a mystery of murder and crime. I struck upon what seemed a clew in the matter of Heathcote's disappearance, and followed it up."

"And the result?"

"I was assured by this boy that one of the men I was following entered a criminal resort, a dive, in company with a young man who answered the description of your cashier. If I can believe the lad a body was subsequently brought out by a private entrance, and taken away in a cart. 'Taken to the dump,' as he explained it. If the body at the Morgue should prove to be that of your employe it will not be hard to find the men who did the work."

Peter Havercamp's florid face grew unnaturally white as he listened. The Irishman had almost entirely discarded his brogue and spoke in a straightforward, earnest way which carried conviction.

He was silent for a moment, and then murmured:

"Poor Heathcote!"

"Yes; he seemed to have fallen into hard lines, but all the same, I would like to know what he was doing in that den and if it was his first visit to the place."

"I suppose we will never know. Would that he had never gone."

"Yes. It would have been better. But it seems to me if the man at the Morgue turns out to be your cashier I have not been in it at all. I suppose that will close the case."

"Oh, no. That will but just open it. After that there will be work to do, and as you seem to have been very successful so far, and have the inside view, I will have you continue on the trail."

"To hunt the murderers down?"

"Something of that kind, but I cannot be explicit until I am assured beyond a doubt of the fate of the young man. His body may not have yet been found."

"We will soon know. You can call on me at any time for further instructions, and I am glad to know you are so well satisfied with what I have done."

Havercamp was not willing he should take his departure, however, but had him go over his story more in detail.

There were some things which, as yet, Burns did not care to confide to the banker, and it was evident there were some things the banker would not confide to him.

Finally he said good-morning and started to leave.

He remembered a certain young lady named Norah, and hoped he might see her again, but she did not make her appearance in the hall, and considering the intelligence he had to communicate, he felt as though he would as soon defer his interview with Miss Helen until the matter in regard to the man at the Morgue was settled.

He had just passed from in front of the house, but was still where he could command a good view of it, when he heard behind him the smooth roll of wheels.

Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw a carriage halt in front of the mansion, while from the open door Helen Havercamp swept down the steps, and stood for a moment by the side of the vehicle.

He was almost afraid to take a second look lest she should see him and call him back, but in spite of the feeling he turned again, not to look at the young lady, but at the driver of the vehicle.

A strange fancy had swept through his brain, and he laughed as he fathomed its nature.

There was something familiar about that coachman, but, of course, it could not be—he looked again, and saw the face clearly.

If there was one thing on which he prided himself it was his aptitude for faces, and about this one he had not a shadow of doubt.

It was that of the man who had un-

masked him down at Red John's, and who was afterward named to him by Fly Billy as Bob Knecker.

There was no use to try to reason himself out of the idea, for no sooner had it come into his head than other thoughts came with it.

Of course he had all along understood there was a story behind the absence of the missing man, which had not been given him, and at once he had an inkling of what it might be, though he was far away enough from fathoming the whole truth.

He walked on without another backward look, until he heard the wheels gliding near, and then took a side glance, though he did not need it to make himself absolutely sure. When the conveyance had turned the next corner he wheeled and went back to the house.

The banker appeared surprised by his unexpected return, but granted him the five minutes farther he asked for.

"If I am not mistaken, you have a new coachman. Could you tell me how you happened to make the change?"

"I have not made a change precisely, but have a new man on temporarily."

"Ah! What has become of the old one?"

"Sick; and thereby hangs a tale, which I may as well tell you."

For reasons best known to Havercamp, the latter had kept to himself the story of the adventures of the preceding night, but now he made a clean breast of them.

"Looks sort av quare," reflected Burns, returning slightly to his brogue.

"Not half as queer as it felt," retorted the banker, with an effort to make light of the matter.

"You ought to know. They hardly put up such a job on ye—for job it was—without some object. Can ye guess what it wor'?"

"I think I can, but for the present prefer to say nothing about it."

"Ye must have had something on your body they wor' wantin' to get."

"Perhaps."

"Thin, av ye don't run thin in they will be tryin' it again. Mebbe the whole thing wor' a plant."

"How do you mean?"

"To get that same coachman in the house. I wouldn't trust him too much before I found out who he wor'."

"I am not trusting any one more than I can help; but I know well enough that he saved our limbs, if not our lives. Nothing can wipe that out, and I feel in duty bound to provide for him until I am sure he will play me false."

Burns might have told something to put the banker more on his guard than ever, but he was not sure it would be advisable. He considered a little over the situation, and then contented himself with a bit of advice, and a warning:

"Better keep a watch. There is some sort of a game on foot, and if you don't find out more about it it wouldn't be a bad plan to have me in the house. Or perhaps I can watch it from the other end."

He took his departure in a thoughtful mood, and hardly had he gone when a telephone told the banker what had been discovered at the Morgue: "Body not Heathcote's at all."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEN AT THE MORGUE.

Burns had expected to go straight from Havercamp's to the agency, but what he had heard changed his intentions.

He thought he was as well able to identify the body at the Morgue as the banker himself, and, in addition, he had another idea.

He disguised himself and went off to look up Fly Billy, with whom he had a conditional appointment.

Clad in a baggy old suit, that had been patched and darned till it was hard to say what had been its original appearance, with gray hair, wrinkled face, and a tremulous stoop to his shoulders, he looked like an old man from the lower walks of life.

Billy stared up at the utter stranger, as

he seemed to be, who addressed him in a squeaky voice.

"My boy, do you know the place where they put the people who are found drowned?"

"In d'e ground. Gimme anudder one."

"No, no! I do not mean that, but there is a place where they take them, so if they have friends to look for them they can be found?"

"Yep. D'ey roost 'em on d'e slab."

"Eh?"

"D'ey put 'em ter snooze on d'e marble."

"Yes, yes; I understand. That is the place. Do you know where it can be found?"

"Kin I strike ye'r nibs fur expenses an' a quarter?"

"Yes, yes, my boy. I will give you a quarter if you will guide me to the spot. I can illy spare it, but the laborer is worthy of his hire."

The old man spoke with a snuffle, but whether it was sanctimony or personal emotion was not so evident.

"Rats! Don't turn on d'e waterworks, but ef you've got d'e spelter, whack it up. I'll tout youse to der Morgue fur d'at altamal an' t'row in d'e croakus."

With trembling fingers the old man fumbled in his pocket and drew out a silver piece.

"D'at's d'e pigeon! D'is way. Have youse d'ere in a flip."

Burns had thought it best to approach the lad in this way since there were several parties in sight, and he did not want to give Billy away, both for his own sake and because it might destroy his usefulness. The two walked away together.

When they were fairly out of sight of the spot the detective gave a private signal which had been agreed on, and watched amusedly to see what the result would be.

To his surprise the boy never moved a feature.

"Oh, I'se Fly Billy; did youse t'ink I didn't tumble?"

"To tell the truth, I did. I hope no one else dropped to the game."

"D'at's right. I ain't fallin' all over meself ter show I know d'e beans when d'e bag's open. Youse a runnin' d'is trolley. Keep on to d'e wire an' I'll stay on d'e platform."

"All right. I'm an old man, going to the Morgue to look for my nephew. I want you to take a look at the corpses there and see if you recognize one of them."

"Old man goes. D'e Morgue, moreover. D'is way, daddy, an' youse don't want ter whindle ef yer finds d'e cull. It's d'e benest plant fur d'e most ov us."

From that time on, until they entered the Morgue, Billy kept up the illusion.

If he was to continue to occupy his quarters in Lannigan's cellar, he knew even better than the detective the importance of so doing, or the dangers in being seen assisting an officer.

They reached the place, finally, without seeing any one on the way who appeared to be watching them.

They looked over the ghastly objects on the slabs, but there was no familiar face to attract their attention.

"Don't 'pear ter be here, uncle," chirruped the boy, with a tug at the detective's coat tail.

"Hev' ter kin' ag'in, er go funder."

Burns heaved a sigh, nodded solemnly, and turned away. Had it not been for another warning tug he might have missed a thing which perhaps was worth the trip here.

In disguise though he was, the man who came gliding forward to look at the bodies was recognized by both Burns and the boy.

It was Vanderlyn.

At once it struck Burns that he had seen the newspaper item, and had come to make sure. Or, it might be, he had some thoughts of preventing identification, or of turning suspicion in the wrong direction.

At all events there was a look of disappointment on his face when, after taking

in everybody, he made sure they were all strangers to him.

He never seemed to give even a glance at the old man and his guide; but Billy was not fooled.

Once outside, he wanted to be off, after the fashion of a boy who has earned his money.

Burns was satisfied to see him go, having hastily made an appointment for a later hour. He was in something of a hurry himself.

The chief looked up when he came into the office, but seeing a smile through the wrinkles, recognized him.

"Great Scott! Have you turned up? We thought you had taken a ride down the bay without waiting for a boat. They are dredging for the corpse now off Sandy Hook."

"Not as big fools as they look, thin. If wor' where Oi started for, but luck wor' more in me favor than judgment."

"Blundered into trouble, then, as usual?"

"Somethin' loike it; but there wor' ither faytures."

"And meantime it is reported that Heathcote is at the Morgue. Adams went over a while ago to see if it is so."

"He moight save the throuble. Oi have been there meself, and it's anither man altogether."

"Then it's an infernal mystery where he went to. There's no trace of him here, and he hasn't passed the Canada line."

"Oi know where he went in at, but the bother is to foinde ave he came out. Oi am attending to that now, and Oi want a mon to look after some wan it won't be so hard to come at."

"No foolishness about it, I suppose."

"Never wanst; it's cowl'd business."

"And the man?"

"Is the Deadly Dandy—Roger Vanderlyn."

"Whew! We were trying to pipe him already. Is he mixed in the matter?"

"Up to the elbow, but it will have to be careful work, an' Oi'm not riddy to say what you'll foinde at the ind av it."

"This begins to get interesting. Vanderlyn was a supposed friend of Heathcote's, and there may be something in what you think you have discovered. Give me the whole story."

Burns rattled off his yarn in few words, and with as little reference to Vanderlyn as possible.

"It is a strange story," commented the head of the bureau, thoughtfully.

"We must find out if there was anything behind the acquaintance of those two men. You have never heard of bad blood between them, or a cause for it?"

"Niver a word—be the same token Oi niver asked."

"Find out. It may be the young cashier was decoyed down there and is still a prisoner, but my own idea is that he is dead. It is too late or too soon to pull the house, but it may come to that."

"But where does Havercamp come in? There's somethin' wrong there."

"We'll have a man to look after them, and you can follow up the clues you have, and keep an eye out for Vanderlyn."

"Oi'll do that last, for Oi have my suspicions; but he's a mon ye wants to touch tinderly."

"It won't do to lose much time about it. He was in here yesterday, and said something about being off on a yacht cruise as soon as the weather settled."

"In here?"

"Yes."

"The gall av him; an' me lyin' d'id in the ditch!"

"It don't seem probable you are on a true lead."

"Be the powers, but it don't."

"And yet that is the strong reason why the matter is worth investigating. You are a daisy to find mare's nests—but, somehow, there is always something in them. Are you sure there is no mistake about this yarn?"

"What Oi saw Oi saw. The rist av it Oi won't swear to."

"It looks like a risk to accuse Vanderlyn of anything crooked, but you may

have stumbled into a big thing. We'll see what is in it, anyhow. What help do you want, and what else are you thinking of doing yourself?"

"Sure, an' O'll stick to the pursuit av Heathcote, an' ye can do what ye loikes in the matter beyand."

"You want a free hand. All right. Go it alone. We'll attack from the other side."

CHAPTER XXII.

"WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING."

There had been something about Mrs. Ferrand which impressed Helen Havercamp more than she knew, and she remembered the promise of the adventurer. That was how it came she was on her way to the Dusseldorf when Burns saw her and the new coachman.

There was no thought of an interview with the driver, because when she came to look at him carefully that morning she came to the conclusion that whatever she had been hoping and suspecting, this man was a perfect stranger.

There could not be a doubt about that.

She knew Harry Heathcote too well to be deceived by any disguise he might assume; and though there were some slight resemblances, they were principally in the matters of size and weight.

Mrs. Ferrand received her cordially, and without any surprise, though it was certainly a singular thing the daughter of Havercamp should make this early morning call.

The lady was alone.

She looked somewhat older than she had done the previous evening, but if anything, more handsome. There was something in her eyes as they rested on the young lady that glorified her whole appearance.

"I hinted last night we would meet again; but I did not suppose it would be so soon."

"You must pardon me if I seem to intrude; but you seemed to have information in reserve, and I could not rest until I obtained it."

"Do not apologize, my dear. I am only too glad to have you come. I have few friends in this city where I am comparatively a stranger, and I appreciate your visit, no matter what its object."

"Its object, of course, is a selfish one. In speaking of Harry Heathcote last night you intimated that you had more information you might give me. I have come for it."

"First, let me ask, has the man at the Morgue been identified?"

"Not to my knowledge, but I am certain he is not my friend."

"You still call Heathcote your friend?"

"I do."

Helen drew herself up proudly, and looked with unwavering orbs into the eyes of her questioner.

"And I suppose nothing could shake your confidence in him?"

"Nothing."

The face of Mrs. Ferrand took on an expression of pity.

"My poor child, if that is the case, it is hardly worth your while to come to me. What I might say you would only disbelieve, and I would be doing more harm than good."

"Harm—to whom?"

"To myself."

"I do not understand, unless you imagine I might repeat what you said. Do you think I must give you an assurance that anything you confide to me will be confidential?"

"No. Indeed, no. It is the fear most of all that I might alienate you entirely from me."

"Nothing you could say would be as apt to do that as the knowledge you had withheld the truth when I asked for it."

"Then the truth you shall have."

"When?"

"Now."

"Proceed. I can bear it."

"I believe you can, since you did not break down last night. I then had reason to believe the body found was that of the missing cashier. If you are certain it

is not I will ask no questions as to how you know, but, believe me, it might be as well if it was. Both for you and for him."

"Not so. While there is life, they say, there is hope. He may be in danger, probably he is; but eventually he will come through it all, safe and with honor."

"His safety is one thing; his honor is another. He may escape with life and even wealth; but his honor—if you measure it as most girls do—is gone already. If you are wise, you will forget him, now and forever."

"It is false! You do not know him. You speak as the world speaks, and as a stranger. My life is staked on his honesty."

"I speak only of what I know. Swear to me not to repeat it until I give permission, nor to hint that I have the knowledge, and I will tell you the whole truth."

"I give you my promise, so far as it does not interfere with knowledge gained in other directions."

"You may know that I am one of the up-to-date writers; and view the different phases of life at first hand, handling the truth without gloves."

Helen bowed.

"It is not strange that I ferret out queer mysteries. I am looking for them, and I do not fear to follow them to the fountain heads."

"Yes."

"This is the whole story."

"Heathcote dabbled in stocks, and was hard hit. He lost not only his own savings, but sunk some twenty thousand belonging to the bank."

Mrs. Ferrand paused to see how her story was received, but Helen only looked straight over her shoulder with a stony stare.

"Unless there was a sudden turn in the tide he was ruined. In that case, he planned with a friend to rob the bank of whatever cash was in the safe. The turn of the tide did not come; the watchman was drugged; the safe was robbed; and the two together went to a refuge of criminals. No one would ever suspect he could be found there, and no place could have been safer, if—"

"If?"

The word dropped breathlessly from the lips of the young lady.

There was a vraisemblance of truth in this story which made her shudder in spite of her trust in Harry Heathcote.

"If he did not receive foul play while there. My child, he went in there, but he has never been seen to come out of the place alive, and he is not there now. If his body was not found on that scow, there is an awful chance that it lies somewhere else, in as obscure a resting place. The question is, would you have his confederate punished for the crime your lover committed? Might it not be better for you if both were permitted to drop out of remembrance, now and forever?"

Coldly and pitilessly the story went on to its bitter end.

"Why do you say his confederate? If one be dead what reason is there that the other should be living?"

"Because, beyond a doubt, that confederate betrayed him."

"What reason have you to believe all this?"

"The reason of absolute truth. Not a word of it is guesswork, but every syllable absolute knowledge. Girl, girl! forget this man! Call off your detective, who will never truly solve the riddle; and let him drop forever out of your memory. It is your own happiness I am playing for. What is Heathcote, or his confederate, to me?"

"Or what am I, for that matter?"

For the first time Mrs. Ferrand was disconcerted.

She paled a trifle, and stammered. There was no ready answer on her tongue.

"That staggers you, does it? One question more. Who was the confederate?"

"That I cannot tell."

"You will not, rather."

"Have it as you please. I have not re-

vealed this for any reason but to make you understand the unworthiness of the man for whom you are eating your heart out. I am not a private detective, however much I may garner up of mystery for the sake of my art. I hold you to your promise, and, if my words cannot convince you, will leave it to time, which reveals all things."

"I do not know whether to thank you; or to say I hate you. You are wildly mistaken on every point, as I am well aware; and yet, below it all, there is a certain bit of truth, no doubt. If you are wise you will not repeat the story you have told me, and you may be sure the secret will be kept by me."

"You begin to see that it cannot be told without injuring the memory of the man you would shield. If it can be done, I, too, would be silent. Do not go. Cannot we speak of something else?"

"Not at present. Perhaps at another time. You seem to guess how deeply this story can wound me; and though I cannot doubt your honesty of purpose, I must remember that you have told it."

There were a few more words of leave-taking, and then Helen departed. She had heard the truth as another woman knew it, and out of it believed she could patch a story which would be nearer to the truth.

How much of it, though, would she dare to give to the detective without breaking her promise?

On her way home she learned several points, and one of them was that the body at the death-house was not that of the young cashier.

At the door she dismissed the coachman, and after laying aside her hat, went straight to her father's room, intending to use the telephone.

There, glancing at the table, she saw something which drove other matters out of her head.

In the center of the table, pinned down by a dagger thrust through its center, was a broad sheet of paper.

"Heavens!" she muttered. "It has come at last!"

She stole forward as though the thing might be alive, and, bending over, stared at the sheet.

On it was printed, in heavy German script:

"WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING; THE END IS NEAR.

BEWARE THE IDES OF JUNE."

"And they are here now! Can father have seen this? I must let him know at once. There may, there must be some escape."

CHAPTER XXIII.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS.

"Come home at once!"

That was the message Helen sent to her father; and it brought him without much delay.

He found his daughter in his room, and as he entered she pointed at the table.

His eyes rested at once on the dagger and paper, and his face paled slightly, while he had the air of a man who had been bracing himself for a shock, and so would not own to the real weight of the blow.

"I found it there!" the young lady exclaimed, "and knew it was no idle hoax! You have received your warning; what is to be done?"

"Nothing."

"But what does it mean?"

"Death, most likely. I have been living under its shadow so long I will hardly fear to face the substance now. If you will believe me, it is actually a relief."

"How will it come?"

"Who knows? That dagger you see there may be the instrument, wielded by the hands of one whom we would least suspect. Or it may be by poison, by fire, by a seemingly natural accident—if an accident can be called natural. The only known thing is that it is certain."

He spoke steadily, without a quaver in

his voice; but it was as a man who had done with hope.

"Can it be possible there is no protection?"

"Temporarily, perhaps; but of what account are a few hours saved by timid concealment? Sooner or later it must come."

"But cannot you get at the source? Surely the law could reach such criminals in prospective."

"Half the time the law cannot find a victim when the deeds have been committed; and then it only reaches the poor tools."

"Yet there must be a reason for so foul a crime. Remember, I ask for no confidences. You have told me a hidden danger menaced you, and to be prepared for a shock. Beyond that you have never gone. How have you merited this vengeance—it can be nothing else—or, how have you drawn the lightnings in your direction?"

"That is the mystery. In this tribunal no man faces a charge, and if he is conscious of no guilt, he can only guess."

"Were—were you ever a member?"

"Never."

"Can it be, then, simply a murder because you are a man of wealth?"

"I think not; but who can tell? All I know is, a demand was made on me for a large sum of money, which I refused to consider. Afterward, I received a warning, and then a notice. This is the final communication."

"If you know so little in the matter, how then can you be sure it is not all a ghastly jest? Why are you so certain that at the worst there is no escape?"

"Because I know such a society exists, with ramifications all over the world; and have heard of work that was done by it beyond a doubt. When you band together thousands of irresponsible lunatics, crazy on a false principle, and have a head center sufficiently powerful to direct them as he wills, you have a power for evil which cannot be combatted at a moment's notice."

"Who is at the head of it?"

"I know not."

"Then there is no chance for an appeal?"

"None."

"What had Harry Heathcote to do with all this?"

The question was asked abruptly, and was apparently the last thing expected.

"I have been afraid you would ask me this, and yet, for the moment, had forgotten. Poor fellow! He undertook to fathom the mystery. To a certain extent I had made him my confidant, and he believed he could unravel the clue I fancied I could give him."

"A clue! But I thought you had none."

"I was not sure, but believed if I had it was connected with a single individual who was apparently above suspicion. He may even succeed—for I cannot believe he is dead."

"And I know he is not. There is then the shadow of a hope."

"A faint one, indeed."

"But if you know where to look for the stroke, half the battle will be won. Have courage."

"I hope I have courage to meet whatever the end may be. I did not think it right for my fate to come upon me without having given you warning. Otherwise I would not have had you know anything about it."

"One question; and I ask you for nothing you do not freely tell. Whatever Harry may have done was with your knowledge and consent?"

"It was."

"Thank Heaven for that. I knew it must be so. And if he never returns, there will be no cloud upon his name?"

"None. Of that I have taken care."

Helen gave a sigh of relief. Whatever Mrs. Ferrand might know there was at least one thing in which she was mistaken.

She would have liked to ask her father who it was Heathcote had attempted to

investigate, since, no doubt, it was the same man who the widow supposed was his confederate, but the time did not seem propitious, and their conference was broken in upon by a call from the telephone.

Even at such a time Peter Havercamp had to attend to business, and rather welcomed the diversion.

After that, for the rest of the day, things moved along in the Havercamp mansion about as usual, and had it not been for a certain strained look about the eyes of the young lady, there would have been no sign whatever of what was smoldering underneath the surface.

In her own room, however, Helen heard from Norah a few items which supplied the latest intelligence.

"The detective was here this morning," greeted Norah.

"He was in the house before you started, and how he got in I cannot make out, but we missed him altogether."

"Are you sure it was the detective?"

A momentary suspicion darted through her mind, though it was immediately dismissed on hearing the answer.

"Just as sure as your father was. I think Mr. Havercamp must have let him in the first time."

"The first time?"

"Yes. That was when we missed him, but right after you left he came back. I think he must have seen you in the carriage, for he was asking questions about the new coachman."

"Ah! And you heard what he said?"

"Of course. That was what I was here for."

"And he has intelligence of Harry?"

"I think he has, but they must have talked that over before, since they didn't say much about him this last time. It appeared to be about the new man that he came."

"Had he recognized him?" asked Helen, eagerly.

"He didn't say, but if I know anything about it he wasn't charmed with the sight of him, and put your father on his guard."

"Tell me what he said."

As well as she could, Norah repeated the conversation in regard to the new coachman.

Miss Havercamp felt somewhat disappointed. In some way she had been about willing to disbelieve the evidence of her own senses, and connected Harry Heathcote with the rescue on the return from Mrs. Broadalbin's.

At first she had barely suspected the visitor might have come in her father's absence, and left the warning which had so disconcerted them both.

Then she imagined that in the coachman the detective had either recognized Harry or some one connected with him.

For this thought the mysterious note was responsible.

And yet she had taken a drive with him that very morning without being able to pierce the mask which covered his identity—if mask there was.

"Then he believes the man is dangerous and a fraud?"

"From what we heard it's not what he believes, but what he does that counts. I told you that it was his blunders that brought him his good luck, and, somehow, I fancy this is one of them. The best that we can do is to keep quiet, and watch. He can do no great harm in the stables."

"But as a friend, he might do a great deal of good in the house."

"Any way at all. He is a good-looking fellow, but he has the face of a devil, for all that."

"One thing more. After father left, did you keep an eye on the room?"

"Almost every minute."

"Who entered it?"

"Not a soul."

"Are you sure?"

"If there did, he or they must have been quieter than a mouse. It was scarce a minute at a time that my eye was not on the door or the room, and I was never too far away to hear the slightest sound."

"Strange. Think again. You must have been absent from your post longer than that at some time."

"Not until you came. After that—you know when I met you?"

"In that time it might be possible," said Helen, musingly.

"Possible for what?"

"For a man to leave the stables through the covered, private way, reach the room, and get away again before I entered it."

"You don't imagine the new Robert to have done such a thing?"

"Hardly; yet it is worth while to take it into consideration. Some one was in the room during my absence; and I believe it was some one connected with the house."

Norah made no mistake. She did not for a moment believe any blame rested on her; and she asked no questions as to why her mistress believed some intruder had been there.

Time enough for her to know the story when Helen desired.

One thing she was sure; the new man would bear watching, and she had received a hint.

The conference ended there, for Miss Havercamp was called away; and she was left to ponder over the fact that wealth did not insure peace of mind, and that it had secrets which it could not confide even to one as trusted as herself.

All the same, she intended to keep a sharp lookout over what was going on; and before long her vigilance was gratified, though what she saw was through mere chance.

Robert was in front of the stable when she looked out of a rear window, and she saw that he had a visitor.

There was something familiar about the figure of the man, who appeared to pause for but an instant, and she gave a start as she saw him slip something into the hand of the coachman.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS NORAH'S FRIEND.

"By the way, what has become of Vanderlyn?"

"Somewhere about, getting ready, old man."

"Getting ready for what—a wedding or a funeral?"

"Don't be too sharp, chappie; I thought you knew. A lot of the boys are on his good books, and he is going to take them down the coast on a cruise. Be gone a week or two, and have no end of a good time."

Burns was in his fashionable suit, and had come across Beechy Lyman, of the Chrysanthemums, apparently by chance.

"Are you on the list?"

"So reported, though I had half a mind to send in my regrets. As it was put off a day or so on account of the weather, I suppose I will go with the gang."

"And when are you going?"

"To-morrow night, if the signs stay right. It was to have been yesterday, but he's in with the Signal Service, and got a special forecast from Old Prob."

"Much obliged to him all the same as if he had bid me to the frolic, but it's news to me."

"You must come around oftener. It was all settled last week; and we were talking about it just before you came in the other evening."

"The Sunbeam is all ready, is she?"

"Yes. A couple of us were down to look at her yesterday afternoon. She's a daisy, and with a man like Vanderlyn to handle her could go all over the world."

Burns wanted to know something more about the yachting trip his chief had mentioned, and it turned out that Lyman was the very man to give it to him.

One thing was sure.

The Deadly Dandy had his preparations made for a leave-taking, and had made them with an openness bewildering if it was actually a flight he was thinking of.

Burns pursued the subject a little farther.

"Any ladies to be of the party?"

"Not any in ours. It's to be a stag party straight."

"Thin ye may have it an' wilcome. What's moonlight an' the wather without the leddies—Heaven bliss 'em."

The subject of gallantry brought back his brogue with it. He asked the conundrum with a heartiness which made Beechy laugh.

"Vanderlyn doesn't seem to be built after that fashion—now. He has a pleasant word for the sex, but never a soft one. I suspect he has never got over his affair with the Haveramps. Some said it was the millions, but I always thought it was the lady herself he was after."

"The Haveramps! What was that? I never heard a word av it."

"Before your time. It must have been a year ago. He was in the swell, then, and made the fiercest kind of running for a while, but the lady wouldn't have him at any price, and he drew out. That was the time Heathcote got the chance to come in. Funny thing about him, by the way. People say there must be something wrong."

"He wor' too owld for her," said Burns, shaking his head, solemnly.

"But thin the poor boy didn't know it."

"Well, he backed out gracefully enough, stood a little joking without the turn of a hair; and I guess is none the worse for it now, though I don't doubt it hurt him hard."

"Yes. When he wants a thing he wants it dreadful bad. He never seemed to bear ill will to Heathcote, anyhow."

"No. That's so. They were as thick as thieves at times. I guess Harry knew; but then it oughtn't to make any difference. No one could say she ever cared for him, and Harry, besides being a lucky dog, is above jealousy of a man that played and lost."

Here was an item of which the detective had no suspicion, and an important one, too.

He had been puzzled to discover the motive for the making away of the cashier, in the face of the declaration that his accounts were straight, and his affairs at the bank above reproach.

But revenge would lead some men as far as gold; and Vanderlyn might be one of those men.

What was there behind this trip on the yacht?

If it meant flight, why had it not been taken at once?

Perhaps the work the man about town had set himself to do was not yet finished; it was a consolation to know he was not expected to handle the Deadly Dandy all by himself.

One thing was plain.

If Vanderlyn was the desperate man the detective thought he was, and had any game in view to be yet worked, Bob Knocker had something to do with it.

He was a member of the gang which had its headquarters at the Gem; and had been placed in the house for some specific purpose.

If Adams was on the trail of Vanderlyn he might be able to thwart the scheme, whatever it was, though it would have been more satisfactory to know he had received more pointers on the subject.

The conversation did not last much longer, and the two separated, without Lyman ever guessing he had been under the pump, and operated on in a most scientific manner.

"If I was only dead sure, I would have the Gem pulled, and drop the Dandy into irons myself," mused the Irishman to himself.

"But though the boy seems to be straight goods, yet there is too much danger he has colored things up to reach the top of his own imagination, and it will not do to take chances of a mistake until something more has been learned. Faith! I believe I'll pipe Vanderlyn a bit myself, av Oi can only find him."

He laughed and set out on a search, in which he was aided by good luck. There was one part of his profession in which he was an adept. No man could change his appearance so quickly or to more decided advantage. In the arts of disguise he was a decided adept.

He searched around in the haunts where Vanderlyn would most likely be found while posing as the man about town.

While doing this he was himself without a suspicion of "cover" about him.

When he could neither see nor hear anything of the man he wanted, he dropped in at his own room a few minutes, and came out an entirely different-looking person.

Then he strolled up to Havercamp's from the nearest car line.

It was quite likely something was to be seen there, and he had a slight hope that he might see something of the bewitching Norah.

He hit it exactly.

That young lady was in sight, yet appeared to be secretly watching a man vanishing in the distance. There was no one else immediately in view but a boy, who almost immediately disappeared in the same direction.

A momentary spasm of something like jealousy shot through Patrick Burns. The fellow she was observing was stoutly built, tall, able bodied, carelessly but by no means shabbily dressed.

Patrick had not exactly lost his heart in a single interview, but he had been smitten a little deeper than the outside.

"The top av the mornin' to yez, an' av ye would allow me a worrud it's gladness Oi moight bring to yer dainty sowl."

He tipped his hat gracefully, and used his softest tones.

Miss Norah gave a start, and then made the first movement toward a hasty retreat. Ordinarily, she had courage enough, but being caught watching she did not stop to consider who might be accosting her, or the meaning of his address.

Her retreat did not suit Burns at all.

"Howly mither!" he exclaimed.

"Sure, it's no stranger Oi am to yez, av ye would only shtop long enough to observe."

The voice grew more familiar, and the young lady took a keen look to see if the face might not be more so.

Then she was puzzled.

"Oi don't want to be shoutin' me name over the town, an' me bein' inthroujiced to yez, so to spake, in the darruk, it's not strange ye did not at wanst remember me. Oi called on ye'r young leddy the other noight."

The detective had managed to draw nearer, so that he could communicate this in a lower tone, and Norah began to understand, though she was still doubtful whether this could be the man himself. It was more likely it was one of his agents.

"It may be so," she said, doubtfully, "but you don't seem to me the same man at all. He was rather good looking."

"An' Oi won't altogether strike ye blind wi'd me ooglyniss. Av Oi had the toime Oi wa'd loike to have a talk wi'd ye on extraneous subjicts, but joost now Oi am on dhe trail an' it's kiss an' go me honey."

"Better go first, then. If you have nothing to tell after all these days we have need of a better man."

"There are hapes to till, but the toime is not yit roipe. Oi ownly shtopped to warn ye that ye have a bad mon, an' a thraitor, in the house. It's the new driver. Thrust him not."

"Then you are good for something, after all. How did you come to find it out?"

"There's plenty more Oi'm good for, as Oi'll convince ye whin the war is over. An' I want to till yez, for ye'r mistriss, do kape an eye on a man named Vanderlyn. There's a game, and av Oi'm not misthooke he's in it to the ilbow."

"Why this gets better and better. You tell me almost as much as I know myself. I was doing that very thing when you interrupted me."

She was laughing at him now, yet the truth was she was getting interested. Burns did not seem to have altogether thrown away his time, even if he had not found Harry Heathcote.

Her words, however, were more than a

surprise to Burns, and he did not stop to consider her sarcasm.

"Sure, Oi'm not fit to outlie ye'r shoes that Oi did not ricognoize him. It's wanst befour Oi saw him to-day. But, thin, Oi wor' ownly seein' the back av him."

Burns really could have beaten himself for not remembering the man he had seen at the morgue. He would have wasted no time here if he had recognized him at once.

Now it was too late to follow.

"Yes, and he had a communication for the new man at the stable. If we knew what it was about it would be more to the point."

"We'd be doin' that same ownly too quick av Oi wor' sure he had it yit."

"He has. Of that I am sure."

"An' he's at the stables?"

"Unless he has flown away."

"Thin I'll go there an' take it away frim him. Is there any way Oi can surphoise him?"

Norah looked at him a little doubtfully.

"You'll have to have two or three surprises to get away with him. From what the miss says, he's a holy terror with his fists. She saw him fight last night."

"An' how was that? But, sure, Oi guess Oi know all about it, an' the story'll kape for anither toime. Joost now Oi'll go troy me luck wi'd him."

Of course, Burns might have arrested the man; but he was not ready for that as yet; and being a private detective he was to a certain extent handicapped. So far he had only the word of Fly Billy for evidence, and at second hand that might not go very far.

These gangs sometimes had "pulls" with the courts, and a prisoner he brought in might not only get a discharge, but make considerable trouble for him.

He preferred to go about this in his own way, especially with a guide and backer like Miss Norah.

The two slipped quietly down the private way from the house, and entered the stables without giving an alarm.

The new coachman was there.

His back was toward the detective, who looked at him keenly.

A slight noise attracted the attention of the man. He turned slowly around, and as he did so Burns sprang at him like a tiger.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. BURNS RETURNS TO HIS MUTTON.

The coachman was the lighter man of the two, and was taken off his guard, but he did not quail.

He had been accustomed to this kind of work, and when he fought it was always as though it was a matter of life and death—which, more than half the time, it was.

He threw up his hands, and then shot out a blow, though hardly balanced for the effort.

At the same time his other hand darted to his hip in quest of his knife.

Burns was watching him all over, and the gesture did not pass unnoticed.

If he could have done so without serious hurt he would have been satisfied to overpower the fellow, and wrest his letter away from him.

That movement assured him it would not be safe to take any chances.

He guarded for the blow at his head, and with the same hand made a feint; but a second later threw all his power into a straight right-hander.

The detective felt sure it would get home, and prove a settler; but in that he was mistaken.

The fellow ducked his head just in time to let the iron knocker's graze along the top of his skull. Even then he was staggered a bit, but before the stroke could be repeated, he had recovered himself and dashed in for a close, striking as he came.

He had not yet recognized the detective, and if he had done so it would have made little difference.

In a moment the two men were locked in each other's arms and struggling for the throw.

Robert was strong and wiry, with a fair

knowledge of the wrestler's art, but Burns was a master.

There was a tugging and twisting, that did not last long, and with tremendous force the detective flung his man and added his weight to the fall.

The coachman lay perfectly still. His head had struck against a joist, and for the moment he appeared like one dead.

Dead or not, Burns wasted no time.

He was after the letter, and that he would have. After that he could pay some attention to the condition of the man.

There was only one bit of paper about him which filled the bill. In fact, his pockets were remarkably empty.

There was a dollar or so in small change, a knife, a handkerchief, and this doubled bit of paper, on which were scrawled a few words in pencil.

That was all.

From behind the door Miss Norah watched the struggle, and looked curiously at the detective as with rapid fingers he searched the pockets of the fallen man. When he returned everything save the paper she gave a sigh of relief, and glided forward.

"Be ready for to-night. If you can get away between three and five come for orders. If not, look out for hints."

There was no address or signature, and this was all the letter said. Burns read it over twice, to make sure of every word, and then returned it to the pocket in which he had found it.

Robert was beginning to recover his senses, and a hasty examination showed there had been no great harm done. If left to himself he would doubtless be all right in five minutes.

Burns moved away, and, leaving the stables, closed the door after him.

"Oi must git out av this now wi'dout his seein' me, an' he'll think it wor' a nightmare kicked him."

"This way. You may as well go as you came. You do swing an awful fist when you get down to business."

"Oi have to. It's part av me trade. Manny thanks for the tip on that same letter, though it wor' not as important as Oi wor' hopin'."

"Indeed, I thought it was worth all the risk."

"And how did ye know that same?"

"It is a good pair of eyes I have in my head."

"Thru for ye. They're as bright as diamonds an' sharp as aygle's."

Norah laughed lightly. She had taken a look over his shoulder without coming very near.

"What are you going to do about it?" she added, becoming serious again.

"Av ye'll drop a hint to your leddy, av he wants to be off a bit this afternoon, to excuse him, Oi think Oi'll be at the interview. It's those same orders Oi would loike to be hearin'."

"Never fear but what he will have a free rein. But what has all this to do with Harry Heathcote? I thought you were engaged to find out about him?"

"It's all part ov the same job. Oi have the clew, an' by to-morry Oi'll till yez all about him."

They spoke as they went along, and there was no time for extended conversation. Burns wanted to get out of the immediate neighborhood as soon as possible, much as he would have enjoyed farther converse with the young lady.

He had some hours before him, since it was not likely Robert would leave the place before the hour appointed, and then would lead the detective straight to Vanderlyn.

Meantime he could be pursuing his investigations elsewhere.

The time lost while he was a prisoner troubled him.

It was rather late to take up the trail at the Gem; and it was doubtful whether even a raid on the place would bring any evidence to light.

When he left the office the chief had formulated no plan, so that he knew nothing of what would be done to assist him; and that lack of knowledge troubled him.

He had plenty to think of.

If a coup was to be made it was pretty surely coming off this night, and he suspected it was the intention of Vanderlyn to be off on the Sunbeam before morning.

If he could come across the Dandy while in disguise it would be possible to have him arrested without any other positive proof of his crookedness; but until he knew his plans Burns was not ready for that. The absence of the man about town might only seal the doom of the missing cashier, in case he was still a captive.

About Knocker he would have no great trouble, he believed, but the time was not ripe for taking him, either.

So long as no more was known he would serve a useful purpose where he was. After the afternoon's conference had taken place it might be worth while to attempt to obtain information from him by a strong pressure; but up to that time he served as a connecting link that could hardly be dispensed with.

He was hurrying across to the elevated, intending to go down-town and seek the neighborhood of the Gem, when he heard a piping voice close behind him:

"Git on to d'e fly cop. My! but ain't he a toppy sifter?"

The tones were beginning to be familiar, and casting a glance behind him he had a glimpse of Fly Billy.

"What are you doin' here, me bye? It's down at the Jim Oi towld ye to be waitin'."

"D'at's right. I were down at the d'he Gem; an' now I'm a-waitin'. Git round d'e corner an' I'll open d'e gabs."

Burns was just turning the corner on to the avenue, and there were entirely too many observers to hold any private conversation.

The words of the boy told him there was something he ought to hear, and without further notice he kept on in the lead until they had reached a spot where they would not be apt to be noticed or overheard.

"Got a stiff fur d'e mort on d'e avenue. Mebbe you'd like ter twig der scratch."

"Which?"

"Oh, don't look like a doody. Youse fly to der place. I seen youse dere me-self."

Burns at once connected this with the Havercamp affairs, and held out his hand.

"Tetch it lightly, pal, fur it's got ter go t'rough."

With this for a warning the lad placed in his fingers the note, which was in the same handwriting as the one already received by Helen Havercamp.

As it was not sealed, the detective had no trouble in making himself acquainted with its brief contents.

"The house is doubly watched, and the crisis is at hand. Have confidence."

"Where did ye git it?" asked Patrick, handing it back with a puzzled air.

"From a cull."

"What cull?"

"D'e same cull d'at gl'me d'e odder."

"What ither wor' that?"

Billy explained.

During the time the detective was a prisoner the boy had executed a commission for the same man who had given him this note. He had delivered a letter for him to Miss Havercamp.

"An' who wor' he? It's twice Oi have ashked ye the question."

"D'at's d'e gammon ov it. Knocker Bob, sure as I'm a fly kid d'at travels on his shape."

The detective was more puzzled than ever.

For what earthly reason would Knocker be sending notes to Miss Havercamp, when only that morning he had been in her company? Of course, there was a plot of some kind behind it, but what was it? From the wording of the note the two seemed to have an understanding; but he felt sure that behind it there was danger for the young lady, who evidently was being deceived.

Billy fidgeted while the detective was revolving this in his mind. He was in haste.

"Say, d'ere, youse don't want ter keep it. Gimme d'e stiff an' let me go. An' say. D'e tall man's down at d'e Gem. An' d'e culls—d'ere's lots ov 'em a callin' d'ere, too. Somet'in's in d'e wind."

"All roight. Take it an' go; an' Oi'll have a hack at the Gem."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TROLLY TUCKER'S BLUFF.

To the casual eye there was nothing suspicious about the visitors who dropped in at the Gem that afternoon.

Men came and went every day, and a few callers more or less made no great showing.

Nevertheless, Fly Billy had dropped on to the fact that there was something more than ordinary going on. He knew the patrons of the place and their stated times, so that when he saw Vanderlyn, and had recognized him in spite of his disguise, he at once was on guard.

He loitered around after the innocent style of a boy of his class until he had made sure that something was on the carpet, and then hurried around the corner, so as to be on time for a report to the detective.

It was then that he met the young man who intrusted to him the note.

There was money in this young man. He paid like a prince, and Billy was sad at times that he had not got acquainted with the better side of Bob Knocker sooner.

In addition to that, the lad was getting an inside view of something which was going on.

If he did not as yet understand it, he had hopes for the future, and that made it all the more interesting for the present.

Of course, he was supposed to be in haste; but a boy of his size always considers himself as entered for a go-as-you-please so long as there is not a club immediately behind him. It was only chance that he decided to run the risks of meeting his friend, the detective, on the way.

The elevated took him up-town in a hurry, so there had not been much time lost. Burns hurried down in the same way.

In the intervening minutes, however, there was a visitor at the Gem, who entered without being seen by either of them.

If Burns had caught a glimpse of him he might possibly have recognized the overgrown boy, or the undersized young man, whom he had seen following on the trail of Vanderlyn.

The youth strolled into the saloon and made his way to the bar. There were half a dozen loungers in the room, but at present the bartender was at leisure. He looked up at the youth after a grim fashion, but caught a queer wink which caused him to hesitate.

As a stranger the lad might have received a warning that his room was better than his company.

"I want to see Mace," said the boy, leaning over the bar and speaking in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

"Who in blazes is Mace?"

"He knows, and I know. If you don't, I'll never tell. He's in the back room, though, and you just let him know Trolley Tucker wants to see him—bad."

The bartender gave an almost imperceptible signal to one of the loungers, who drew near and listened to a few words whispered into his ear.

He nodded and disappeared by the door through which Vanderlyn and Harry Heathcote had passed the Saturday night before.

He was absent but a minute or two, and when he returned, nodded and turned away.

"All right, kid. Reckon ther cull you mean are there. You kin look an' see."

"Thankee fur nothin'. If I don't find him you'll be apt ter hear ther reason why."

With a careless laugh he flung away from the bar, and made his way to the rear.

The bartender turned and pushed back

a little slide in the wall. There was an arrangement there, with reflectors, which gave him a view of the hall in which the stranger found himself.

"Don't remember his nibs, but he knows the ropes," the man muttered, as he saw that the lad was moving along without a second of hesitation.

"Guess it's a square deal he were givin' me. If it weren't, Mace knows enough to take care of himself."

The lad moved straight on up the stairway, and at the head of the steps gave a knock of a peculiar nature.

There was the sound of the shooting of a bolt, and the door at which he had halted flew open.

Half a dozen men were lolling around in much the same careless way as those below, and in one corner of the large room, which was evidently, at times, used for a gambling hell, two men were talking in a low, earnest tone.

The lad caught sight of the pair at the first comprehensive glance he gave, and strolled across without another look at the other occupants.

"Mace it is," he said, coolly, halting in front of the couple, and looking straight into the face of the tall man, who glared up at him.

"I've been waiting to hear from you, and now the time's about up. I want to have a little private talk, and see what we are going to do."

"Mace goes, but who the Hades are you?"

"Trolly Tucker'll do well enough to begin with, and you'll know the rest when you get through."

The lad spoke with a careless shake of the head, and did not seem at all troubled by the unfriendly reception with which he had been met.

"If I dropped you out of the window and broke a few bones it would serve you about right."

"It would be mighty bad for both of us, then. Is your friend listening?"

"That's just as you say, my lord. There'll be some howling done soon if you don't open out. I've no time to waste with chaff, and this isn't a healthy place to come and try it on."

"I'm aware of that last. Mebbe you'd like to take a walk. I can talk to you as we go along."

It was plain that the lad did not intend to speak before the other man, and the latter quietly arose from his seat and left the room, leaving the two to themselves.

"Now, then, Vanderlyn, let's get down to our mutton. You know who I am and what I am here for, and it is no use to put off the evil day. What do you propose?"

"You are either mad, or willing to court death, or you never would have thrust yourself into the lion's den. It is not what I propose that is the question now; but what security you can give to justify us in letting you go. If you know as much as you profess, you must be sure the chances are strong against your ever going out of here alive."

"Excuse me, if you please. I am not as big a fool as I look, nor are you as immense an idiot as you want to make people believe you are."

"Then why do you put yourself into a corner where you must be killed to make the rest of us safe? You know too much."

"Entirely too much to walk into a trap, the door of which I could not open when I was ready to go out."

The disguised Vanderlyn laughed shortly, and the other continued:

"You see, I am giving you credit for looking before you leap; and that you are in no hurry to precipitate a crisis."

"But you know I will protect myself at any cost; and if I did not the rest would."

"There are ways of doing that, and there are other ways. The only one of them which is safe is to come to terms. I mean to blackmail you; and I don't make any bones about it. I wouldn't tell you that, here in this den, if I did not know I was safe."

Vanderlyn's eyes glowed like fire, but he kept control of his tongue.

"For a woman you have wonderful nerve; but if there is any way for you to escape when we have you here by yourself, and I can break your neck with a single twist of my wrist, I would like to know what it is."

"Your own fears, man. Your own fears. You have recognized me at last—if you did not from the first. I have been giving you time to think the matter over, but now you have made up your mind to bolt I can wait no longer."

"If I refuse to be stripped."

"Then I turn the clew over to the men who are hunting for Henry Heathcote."

"And with such a purpose you imagine we would let you go out of here alive?"

"If you will look across to yonder corner you will see a man watching the house. He belongs to me."

"Well?"

"If I do not give him the assurance within an hour that all is right there will be a platoon of police in the house within the next half hour after that."

"Ah. Glad you told me. We will look after him."

"So I supposed you would say; and so I have another man backsetting him. Attempt any game on the one and the other acts. You are aware I have some very peculiar friends. Those men are two of them."

Vanderlyn gritted his teeth. He knew Mrs. Ferrand as an adventuress who was not only wily, but full of nerve, and did not doubt she was speaking the truth in regard to the watch on the house. She knew a great deal—how much could she prove?

He hesitated, and the woman saw it.

"No use, Roger; you will have to come to terms. You cannot afford to be brought before a judge—just now least of all. Why, a glance through the lockers of the Sunbeam would be your ruin."

"Stop! I know you believe in honor among thieves, and I can trust in your word if it is once given. How much do you demand? Remember, I have no great sum in my hands, and if you are not reasonable I will have to break your neck and run the chances."

Vanderlyn came to a sudden conclusion. He had too much at stake to run any chances that were unnecessary. Better to pay a price for it, and have this woman for an ally, even though he did not trust her.

"In a game like this has been, I ought to say halves, and insist on nothing less."

"You are mad. You do not even know what the game is, and that I am a dollar the richer for its playing."

"Oh, I can guess pretty shrewdly what it was worth to you. And yet I do not want to crowd you too hard. Ten thousand dollars will insure silence on my part as to what the missing cashier did, and where he went to."

"Ten thousand thunders! I have not that much in the world."

"Excuse me, Roger Vanderlyn, but you lie."

She stood with her two hands in the side pockets of the coat she wore, while she looked him steadily in the eyes.

There was not a shadow of flinching on her part, and he heard the warning clicks of the hammers of the derringers which rested under her thumbs. Whatever he might decide to do, at that moment she had his life under her command, and he was well aware she had the courage to use her advantages.

For a moment Madame Ferrand had victory within her grasp.

Then the scales turned as suddenly.

The floor opened as a trap-door dropped from under her feet, and she went downward, the report of her derringers echoing through the room as she fell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SLUGGERS FROM THE BROWN JUG.

For a moment nothing could be heard in the room except the hard breathing of the men who had witnessed the sudden disappearance.

The smoke drifted away, showing Vanderlyn apparently unhurt, and the trap once more securely back in its place.

"Who touched off the spring?"

The man about town looked sharply at the little group of men at the other end of the room. They could hardly have heard the conversation, and yet, since he had not opened the trap, he knew no one else to blame.

"Not any of us," answered the man with whom he had been conversing at the time Mrs. Ferrand entered.

"We couldn't reach it, and you ought to know it."

"I did," interposed a new-comer, who entered through a side door.

He was the man with whom Vanderlyn was talking a few moments before.

"I heard her talk, and I saw that Mace was weakening, so there was nothing else to do if I wanted to save the outfit."

"That's fine talk, Spider, but you'll be more apt to ruin it. You heard what she said about the parties waiting on the outside."

"I heard, but that sort of stuff don't count. I'm surprised a man of your experience and years could be bluffed after that schoolboy fashion."

Vanderlyn scowled.

He was not in the habit of being treated this way. Had it not been for the common danger he would have answered in kind.

"Bluff or no bluff, it's safe to say we can look out for breakers. There is half an hour yet to spare; and I don't know but what the best plan would be to improve the opportunity and bolt."

"Bolt, nothing. There's your man, down there; what's the matter with picking him up and running him in here to see if he will tell the same story."

"But while we're doing that the other one will get away."

"There is no other one. I've been watching the game. He is all there is of 'em; and he's not so very much to look at, either."

"I half believe you are right, and that you have hit the game to play. Work it if you can, and I'll go down to the bottom of the drop and see whether the woman is alive. It's a nasty fall, and it's two to one she's not."

"That's all right; but before we go we'd like to know who this party is, and what sort of a racket it is she is trying to work. There is something about this we ought to have known."

"Didn't you hear her say she was a blackmailer, pure and simple? She demanded ten thousand dollars as the price of my safety."

"And how about ours?"

"She knows nothing about you, and cares less. It is an old grudge between us, that started on the other side of the water. If it wasn't for revenge she wouldn't run the risk of having her name mixed up with us for twice the money."

"But what does she know? How did she come to get on the trail?"

"Unfortunately, she heard a conversation between that fool of a cashier and myself."

"And after that?"

"Kept her eyes open and saw a good deal," replied Vanderlyn, sulkily.

He was angry to see this Spider come to the front, who had heretofore been a simple lieutenant; but he dared not express his resentment as yet.

"It might have been worth while to have anted up the amount, and taken her in on the ground floor. A woman like that is worth her price. I reckon it's too late now. Go look after her, and we'll attend to her pard outside."

There was a move to go, Vanderlyn preceding the rest.

As he passed out at the door by which Spider had entered, the latter gave a wink to one of the nearest of the little crowd.

"It won't hurt to keep an eye on him," he said, in a low tone.

"Follow him up, and if he needs help you can be on hand; but if there's any talking going, better hear what it is first. It's just at the last moment the danger

comes in. The pull will be to get over the next twenty-four hours."

The party addressed nodded, and silently left in the wake of the man about town, while the individual who had come to the front as the leading spirit took a cautious view from the window.

A little exclamation attracted the attention of the rest.

"Gol blame me if we haven't got 'em. They're both there."

An ordinary, every-day sort of individual might not have been able to make the discovery, but eyes that have been sharpened by crime and have been accustomed to look behind every bush to see an officer are very keen.

"The mort told no lie. There's her man watching the house; and there's his backstop, watching him. It will take the mob of us, but we'll get them both."

The crowd took a look, cautiously, and one at a time.

It was not hard to make out the two who were supposed to be the sentinels.

One of them was lounging in front of Red John's as though he belonged there, and Vanderlyn knew that Madame Ferrand, in one garb or another, had some sort of a footing at that saloon, though he had said nothing of it.

The other man, who looked on from a distance, had only lately appeared upon the scene, and it seemed almost an intuition that told he was a spy; but up to the present time no one had recognized him as Patrick Burns, or imagined that he was a special detective.

There was little time to waste, and there seemed only one way to get at the men. They had to be slugged right where they were.

"No croakin', you know," continued the leading spirit.

"We want to do 'em up so they can't whindle, but to-morrow they can get up and say what they choose."

"What's d'e use ov us a doin' ther job if we kin git d'e boys out from d'e Brown Jug ter lay him cold fur a quid. Black Jim's d'ere on d'e boose, an' d'e gang d'at trains wi'd 'em."

The suggestion was not a bad one.

The Brown Jug was around the corner, and was a tougher resort, even, than Red John's and the Gem, while Black Jim was a notorious thug, who had been up half a dozen times for laying out his man.

"D'at's right," chimed in another.

"Jim's jest itchin' ter take d'e street. It's a bad time ov day fur a celebration, but d'at don't count wi'd him. We'll send him ahead ter make d'e clean up at John's, an' we'll look after d'e odder bloke."

When Burns came down into the neighborhood, and turned his attention to the Gem, he was shrewd enough to take a view of its surroundings.

Almost the first thing that attracted his attention was this man, who appeared to be practically in the same business.

He wondered if it could be a man from the office; and though he thought he could pierce any disguise which Adams might assume, he was in doubt whether this could be that astute individual or not.

It was a matter of some importance to find out.

If it was a brother detective, there was little use in both wasting their time on the same spot, and he would have been glad to give a pointer or two and then be off to keep an eye on Bob Knocker and the Havercamp household.

It was too soon, however, for him to come into the foreground; and while he waited there came "a cloud over the moon."

A gang of men went staggering by, talking loud and covering the sidewalk with an air of proprietorship that would have made a timid man take to the middle of the street and wish himself on the other side of the block.

In front was Black Jim, a herculean fellow, who had been a sailor at one time, and perhaps a pirate, for that matter.

He was fighting drunk, and had the

sleeves of his dirty blue flannel shirt rolled up past his elbows, showing the great muscles of his brawny arms, while he flourished his ponderous fists and talked viciously to his friends.

The crowd just missed running against the detective, but as they passed him without apparent notice he kept his place, and gazed after them curiously.

As yet he had no suspicion of their purpose.

Neither had the man in front of Red John's, until suddenly the crowd halted, and before he knew what was on foot he was hustled out into its midst.

There was a chorus of profane talk; harsh words, as though a quarrel was going on, a swaying of figures, and a sound of hard thumps.

It was all over in a minute, so far as the spy was concerned. If there was any life left in him it was because he had a tough head and an obstinate intention not to die until the last minute.

Black Jim and his gang had no modesty, and went up to the front without a bit of hesitation.

They might have gone even farther than was intended had there not been an interruption; and it came from the Gem.

From the saloon across the street a small crowd rushed out, as though attracted by the affray, and made for the spot.

"Go slow, Jimmy—d'ere's d'e cops. You done him out d'is time sure enough."

Under most circumstances Jimmy would have just as soon the cops come as not, but he was sober enough at least to remember that this was not an ordinary carnival, gotten up for his especial amusement, but that there was coin behind it, which he needed badly.

His pockets had been empty for an hour or more, and he was not ready to tie up on the booze.

He made some sort of a protest, but his gang closed around him, and laughing, shouting, and without a backward glance at the thing left on the sidewalk, they hurried away.

Burns viewed the performance with interest.

He thought it was an ordinary brawl, but when the party came out from the Gem it appeared that it was a special interposition in his favor, and he moved closer.

As he did so, several men who had been viewing the scene from his neighborhood, moved on with him.

He had been so taken up with what was going on that he had not noticed their approach; and now was rather glad of their company.

They had remarks to make about Black Jimmy and his gang which he overheard, and he fancied they might know something about their victim.

The victim was in a bad way.

He was bleeding freely, and lay without sense or motion.

"He's slugged for good," Burns heard one man say, who was bending over him.

"Y'er off on d'at. He's on'y had a stiff 'un on d'e jaw. Kerry him over to d'e Gem an' put him in d'e back room wi'd a snort ov hardware an' he'll be right side up wi'd care. Ketch hold an' we'll take him in. It won't do for him ter lie d'ere."

Several others were willing to lend a helping hand, and between them the man was borne away, limp and helpless, but not altogether looking like a dead man.

The crowd went along, and with the crowd went Patrick Burns.

He was as fearless as the average, or more so, and this solved the problem of getting into the Gem without attracting attention.

The bearers knew the ways of the house, without a question. They nodded to the man behind the bar, and went straight on through, ascending the stairway in the hall beyond.

Part of the procession dropped off, but Burns stayed with the remnant; and with Burns stayed the men who had been marking him.

The door closed behind them, and then,

without the least warning, one of the men on the stairway wheeled and struck a heavy blow at the detective's face, while three threw themselves upon him from behind.

He dodged the blow, but that was only to lay himself more thoroughly open. One of the men at his back secured the garroter's hug on his neck, while the others caught his arms. He was in a vise.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARCO.

Fortunately for Patrick Burns, no one had recognized him.

He was in a different garb, and no one dreamed he was the man who had been unmasked at Red John's, and who had subsequently escaped the dangers of the drains by the unsuspected assistance of Fly Billy.

Had they dreamed of such a thing it would have gone much worse with him in the attack so unexpectedly made upon him in the back hallway at the Gem.

There were few better men in a rough-and-tumble or a stand-up fight; but in this affair the detective had positively no chance whatever.

That crushing pressure on his throat would alone have mastered him, for, at the disadvantage he was under, it was impossible to shake it off. In addition, however, were the two men who wrenched his arms back, and the fourth man who dodged behind him the moment he saw the others had fastened their grips.

He was much too wise to run the chances of a hoist from the foot of the still struggling man. He reached over from the rear, and pressed a moist cloth against his face.

That ended the struggle in short order.

Burns felt his senses gliding away from him, and after a short but furious struggle with the drug he collapsed.

He had not time fairly to think what had happened to him, and it was doubtful if he would know when he returned to his senses.

Spider was the man who had struck from the stairway and applied the drug.

They carried the detective away between them, leaving the discussion of his final disposition to the future.

For the present it was enough for him to vanish beyond the chance of doing harm.

Meantime, the man who had been slugged by the crowd from the Brown Jug had disappeared, but had been handled with more care.

There was a little room on the second story which was occasionally used as a bedroom by the man who was here known as Mace, though in sweller circles he was known as Vanderlyn.

His belongings, such as he had kept here, were for the most part removed, but the bed still remained, and there was a stout lock on the door.

For a crippled man it would serve as a good enough prison, so long as he made no great amount of racket, and against that it would not be hard to provide.

He was carried there and laid on the bed.

"Curses on it!" said Spider, a little later, as he looked the fellow over; "what infernal use was there for this bit of luck? It won't do to let him die here: Mace is surgeon enough to plaster him up, and Mace will have to look at him."

"Let him hop; it ain't our funeral."

"Yes; but it's our plant. Stay here while I go look for Mace. Gol blame me if he don't look as though he carried a white feather and was going to show it."

"Jest when it's all over but the shout-in'."

"Yes. That's the curse of it. He never did it before, and if he don't look spry he'll never do it again."

The Spider left the room, after a while coming back, and Vanderlyn was with him.

"You are surgeon enough to set this man straight. Look him over."

"I'll see what I can do," answered Vanderlyn, coolly.

He did not get at his work with any particular tenderness, but he had a rough skill and some experience in desperate cases.

He was in search of broken bones, and the first thing he looked at was the skull. "Looks like concussion of the brain," he muttered, more to himself than to the Spider, as he began his ministrations.

"In that case I cannot answer for him, but the rest I can plaster up well enough."

It was a little awkward, looking after the ribs of the man without being able to receive any assistance from him, and with the broken arm in the way; but he passed a broad band around the body to somewhat hold the ends in place, and as there was no depression, this was all that for the present was necessary.

Then he got to work on the arm.

The Spider watched him, and aided now and then, when his services could be of use. A regular surgeon could not have finished the job much sooner or better.

With the broken bones out of the road the amateur surgeon began on the head of the injured man, who seemed at last to be recovering something of his senses.

He softly spunged out the cuts, and washed away the blood from the battered face. The tenderness seemed instinctive.

"There, my friend, you'll do. If they ever ask you who was the good Samaritan who sponged you off, and tied you up, tell 'em he was a doctor who happened along that way, and that he didn't leave his name."

He spoke with a laugh, and yet there was a troubled look in his eyes as he stared at his patient, who had just given a groan.

It scarcely seemed likely there could be any recognition of the man who lay there, yet there was something familiar, something which took Vanderlyn back to the years which had passed.

He fell back a pace from the bed and stared at the face in which he could detect a trace of returning life and color.

While he looked the eyes opened and glared full into his own.

"Great Heavens!" he muttered, as he met that look. "It is Marco."

Spider was watching, and he saw the hand of the man about town go back to his hip.

"Steady, cap; it's too late for that now, and here."

The words recalled Vanderlyn to himself, and he turned hastily away, passing out of sight of the man on the bed, and beckoning to the Spider as he went.

"See if he knows me. If he does, he must die. If he does not, beware how you put him on the scent."

He hissed out these words in a tone too low to reach the injured man, and left the room without another glance.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HIGH COUNCIL OF THE SEVEN.

Peter Haverkamp had no doubts of the genuineness of the letter which had appeared so mysteriously in his home office.

He had received warning before from the same institution, which had kindly given him time to set his house in order.

Now the blow was about to fall, though he did not know which way to look for it.

It is true he had at one time hoped to make something of a fight, but that thought had almost vanished.

He had several men in his house, who acted more or less as guards, but he could not have them trotting around after him wherever he went.

The only thing he could do was to keep a bright lookout, and when the attack came, defend himself as well as possible.

When he left the house he managed to recover his courage to a great extent, and had determined to put the thing out of his mind as much as possible.

There were several other things he could think about if he could once forget the order of the council. One of them was the lady he had seen at Mrs. Broadalbin's, who, Helen assured him, bore the name of Mrs. Ferrand.

He made some inquiries of Grimsby

about her, and discovered that she boarded at the Dusseldorf.

His own daughter could have told him just as well, but he did not know that.

Besides, he would not, for any money, have allowed Helen to know he was interested in the fair adventuress sufficiently to think seriously about calling on her.

No doubt he would have drifted into the Dusseldorf that afternoon had it not been for a communication he received. The letter was so remarkable that he read it over several times; and then was not sure whether he understood what it meant, though it seemed simple enough on the face of it.

"Dusseldorf Hotel.

"My Dear Sir:—It is important that I have an interview with you this evening, and as it must be a private one, I do not care to have you call on me at the hotel. Delphine is with me yet, and she might claim a place in the family circle. Of course you will keep this matter from our daughter, whose interests are the principal cause of the conference. I will send a carriage for you, which will take you to the house of a friend, where we can consider the situation without fear of interruption. It is needless to say that I have revealed nothing about our matters to any one as yet; but there are contingencies which are probable, and I must know how they are to be met. Fail at your peril. CHRISTINE.

"P. S.—It is as important to me as to you that all knowledge of our former relations should remain a secret. No answer required."

"She has some grace about her," murmured the banker.

"It is evident she does not care that Helen should know, and if I can keep her in that frame of mind I shall be only too glad.

"I would offer her a million to take herself the other side of the ocean but she would take it, spend it, and come back.

"I must make some terms with her, but not too easily. She would want to absorb the bank. Of course I must go."

As far as keeping the appointment went he was as sure that he must go as he was of anything.

So far, Helen never suspected, and for the future it might be possible to keep them apart.

It must be done, in fact.

If the lady remained here an explosion would come some day without a doubt, and by that time who could tell what complications might have been invented by a woman as ingenious as Christine. If she did not ruin him financially, she would at least destroy father and daughter socially.

The more he thought of it, the less he thought of the other thing, and as for business—the bank would have broken if it had depended on his skill to sustain it that long June afternoon.

Later on, when the doors were closed, he made a little excursion.

He had no plan laid out when he started, but as if by instinct his feet turned toward the Dusseldorf.

He had no intention of calling on the lady who now bore the name of Ferrand. He would have been only too glad if he could have safely avoided the interview appointed for that evening; but there was a sort of fascination which drew him.

He was still a stout, active man, and he stepped firmly along the sidewalk, wondering what would happen if he came face to face with Christine, but showing no sign on his face of the turmoil within.

As he drew near the hotel he saw a woman come out, who looked anxiously about her, without recognizing him. It had been years since he had seen her, but he was sure she was Delphine.

As she passed him he looked into her face, and in spite of the light veil which partially covered it he saw she was troubled.

He had an idea that the maid was worse than her mistress, and wondered if her worry was over the proposed meet-

ing which in some way she had got wind of.

Looking over his shoulder a moment later he saw she had halted and was speaking to a gentleman who had come face to face with her.

The gentleman was Grimsby, who was on his way to the hotel. There was to be a social gathering at Mrs. Baker's that evening, at which Mrs. Ferrand was due; and the director wished to make arrangements with the fascinating widow. She was to read a dramatic chapter from "Modern Ethics," and Grimsby desired to carry her book.

He had known the lady but a short time, yet, as she had a bank account, and was fascinating for herself, and had suddenly made some little furore in the society in which he moved, he was making the running from the very start.

Haverkamp shrugged his shoulders and went on. It was impossible for him to give the director a warning, but he was sure that some day there would be a pretty row when the truth came out.

The banker did not enter the Dusseldorf.

Had he done so he would have found that Mrs. Ferrand was not in.

He did make a call, though, at the detective agency, where there was no news of Heathcote, and nothing had been heard of Burns since morning. He thought of unburdening himself to the chief, but restrained his confidences and asked that the investigation should be widened somewhat, and something of a watch kept on his house.

It was a delicate matter for him to explain, at least until the fate of Heathcote was better assured.

When he returned home, Helen had received her second letter, though Fly Billy had been put to his stumps to meet her, and it was only by chance that he had been able to slip it into her hand.

When, with his wares fully displayed, he had sought an interview, he had been put off by a servant with the statement that the gentlemen were out and the lady of the house did not wear suspenders.

It was Norah, finally, who saved him.

"Have we any engagements for this evening?" asked Haverkamp, as father and daughter sat down to the table together.

"I suppose so," answered Helen, with a weary smile.

"Until we get out of town we will have about four evenings in the week when we ought to be away from home, though it would not be hard to skip any of the gatherings. They are rather informal. To-night we should attend a gathering at Mrs. Baker's."

"You will have to do duty for both of us, I am afraid, unless I can call later in the evening."

"Why?"

"A business engagement, that is all."

He saw by the shade that passed over her face that she feared his absence had something to do with the mystery they were confronting.

"You are sure you will be in no especial danger?"

"Very sure; and with Robert to drive I believe I will be more comfortable knowing you are there than if you were at home. If anything is to happen, it will probably be here, and in spite of our vigilance."

"Have it as you wish," said the young lady, resignedly.

From the tenor of the last note she had received from the correspondent she suspected to be Harry Heathcote, it was more than likely that her father was correct.

"I think I can take you there, and at least call for you before the affair breaks up. If I do not appear when you are ready to come home, do not wait."

It was not likely the carriage which was to convey him to the rendezvous would call at an early hour, and he hoped he could do escort duty and yet meet his engagement.

To make sure, however, he left word that he would return within half an hour.

and that if any one came for him the individual should call again.

In one way or another matters were so accurately timed that when his own carriage set him down at his door another was just driving up.

He had just time for a word with his coachman.

"It may be, Robert, I will be unable to return to Mrs. Baker's this evening. Can I trust you?"

"You've done it already, sir; and you sha'n't be sorry for it, sir."

"I hope not. Your credentials, such as they were, seemed all right, but it is taking a risk, as you must know. After your work last night, however, I am inclined to put full confidence in your courage, and hope I can secure your devotion."

"Don't worry about that, sir. It's all there."

"There is no telling what will happen, and you must keep on guard. For various reasons I do not care to have the police attempt to protect me. I would sooner trust to you. See that nothing happens to my daughter, and your services will be better rewarded even than you hope for."

"I'm seeing with my life. No harm shall come to her, and perhaps the sooner this thing is over the better."

Havercamp nodded, but said no more. In another minute he was rolling away in a carriage he had never seen before, but which looked like a private concern.

The driver wore a uniform, and sat bolt upright, as stiff as an old soldier on parade. He said nothing, after he had made sure the gentleman was Peter Havercamp, but he handled his horses after the manner of a man who knew his business.

The banker was busy with his own thoughts.

It had been fifteen years since he spoke to Christine, and at that time if words could have killed he would certainly have committed a murder.

He was a little surprised to note how differently he felt just now; yet he had no regrets for the course he took then.

There had been no other course possible.

The carriage was close, the side streets dark. He was so absorbed with his own thoughts that it was with a start he noticed the carriage had halted.

The building looked like the private residence of a person of means, and a person standing on the steps beckoned to him and then entered.

He was not certain, but thought it looked like Christine.

"This way, sir," said a servant, as he entered the carpeted hall.

He entered a darkened reception hall, and as he stepped forward heard the door behind him close, and then the click of the lock, while the low glimmer of gas burst into a full flame, revealing through the folding doors the room beyond, with half a dozen men sitting at a heavy mahogany table.

He knew there was treachery, then, and his hand darted to his pistol pocket; but he was too late. A grip closed on him from behind, and his weapons were wrenched away.

At that he made no great struggle, and was marched toward the table.

"Good-evening, sir," said one of the men, looking up, and speaking with a slight foreign accent.

"We are the High Council of the Seven, sitting for the Grand Council of the North Americas, to inquire into the death of one Victor Urbassy. We have about concluded our labors, and ask why sentence of death should not be pronounced on you?"

CHAPTER XXX.

DOOMED.

After that first instinctive movement, Havercamp attempted no farther resistance.

It would have been useless, for his own weapon was wrenched away from him, while at his ear he heard the click of its hammer as it was forced back.

He reasoned very clearly in the sec-

ond before the speaker addressed him, and it seemed to him that if he was brought there to be killed, they would not hesitate to blow his brains out rather than allow him a chance for successful resistance.

To anticipate a few moments the time for his taking off would be rather a pleasure, if it could be pleaded as a sort of self-defense.

He listened with calmness to the arbitrary speech of the court, and for a moment was as much in the dark as ever.

He remained silent.

"You have no answer. You acknowledge your treachery, and that the death sentence is only your just reward?"

"I acknowledge nothing, for I deny that I know anything concerning the matter of which you speak. I deny, also, that you have any jurisdiction, or that I am at all accountable to you for anything I have ever done. If you are allies of the discarded woman who lured me to this place, I will say that, while I was willing to treat with her, I shall refuse to acknowledge any go-betweens, and that such mummery as this will be to her own loss."

"You may as well dismiss all thought of the lady as connected with the affair. She knows nothing of it, and her name was simply used as a means."

"I do not believe you. It stands to reason that none save she could know sufficient of my affairs to write this letter."

"Under the circumstances we will pardon your lack of courtesy. We know a great deal. It is part of our religion to be able to deal with all men, each after his own peculiar conditions. The lady has come under our observation before."

"What of that? She may have slaughtered a score of Urbassies since she left my roof and I none the wiser."

"You wrong her, my dear sir. It is she who had nothing to do with the murder."

"Ah, a murder, was it? Then why have not the courts taken hold of the affair? I am willing to answer there—as I never to my recollection saw the man."

"Unfortunately, this is one of the affairs the law does not meet. In fact, the law itself was answerable for the killing, which only we who are above the law can avenge. It occurred some years ago, and some thousand miles away, so that it is possible we will have to refresh your mind as to the circumstances."

"Ah! Before I became an American citizen?"

"Precisely. 'The mills grind slow, but they grind exceedingly fine.' Punishment has been unavoidably delayed, but it was certain to come some day. There was such a complete cleaning up that there was no one left to immediately avenge, and by the time our affairs had reorganized, you were beyond our jurisdiction and reach."

Havercamp began to look thoughtful.

He knew at last to what this suavely speaking gentleman was alluding, though up to this time he had never dreamed that he could be personally connected with it.

"I see by your countenance that you understand me. What have you to say? Again I ask."

"Nothing. I know no reason why I should be connected with the matter. It is possible I remember now something of a clearing out of Nihilists, or men of that tribe, which took place years ago."

"And perhaps you remember Urbassy?"

"I certainly do not."

He spoke with such assurance that the speaker at the table appeared staggered.

"Allow me to refresh your memory, then."

"At the time, which was a number of years ago, you were, as now, in the banking business, though then it was solely on your own account. This Victor Urbassy was one of your depositors. You follow me?"

"He may have been. Among the many thousands I cannot be expected to remember the name of one who has been dead a dozen years or more, and with whom I could have had no particular relations."

The banker spoke confidently, yet it

seemed to him he began to remember who this Urbassy was.

"He placed in your hands a large amount of money, to be drawn on demand. Also, he intrusted you with a package of papers, which he wished you to believe related to certain landed possessions. Do you know what the contents of those papers were?"

"I know nothing about them at all."

"They were the only available records of the ramifications of our order, and they were papers any crowned ruffian in Europe would have freely given a million to possess. How much did you receive for betraying them into the hands of the police?"

Peter Havercamp was irreproachably dressed, but naturally the lines of his face inclined too greatly to jollity to allow him much of the commanding in his appearance. He came as near to absolute dignity of deportment just now as he had ever done.

He drew himself up and folded his arms.

"I absolutely refuse to discuss this subject farther, after such an insult as that."

"Then we will discuss it for you. It grew warm for our sacred council, and the day came when it seemed best that Urbassy should transfer himself and his belongings to a safer spot. He began his arrangements, and then—he trusted you."

Havercamp compressed his lips and was silent.

All the scorn that was compressed in the final word could not make him open his mouth.

"Had he waited until the last moment all might have been well, but he gave you notice in advance that he would withdraw his account, and you sold him out."

"He called at your bank at the appointed time, received the funds of the council and the papers to which I have alluded, but scarcely had he turned away when the minions of the law were upon him, and he was slain, sir, almost on your own threshold. And this was the man you say you do not remember."

"I remember something of this now, but I knew nothing more about it than did the outside world. If he belonged to your order the secret was certainly well kept. I knew nothing of it then. He received every dollar entrusted to my hands and his papers intact. To crown all, the man who was killed near to my bank was named Van Behm."

"By his papers you must have seen his true name was Urbassy."

"If I had seen the papers I might have remembered. At the time the matter must have been hushed up. I was never called on to identify the man, nor was it known why he had been killed."

"The policy of the tyrants. You had bargained as you thought for immunity. Perhaps the money he would have drawn remained with you. No doubt the reward received was more. It and the papers disappeared, but, one after another, men who were named in the latter were hunted down, both there and abroad. The brother who was with Urbassy that day was hurried away to a dungeon, without even the form of a trial. Perhaps he was secretly executed. From that day to this there has been no trace of him."

"Ah, that brother. Who was he?"

Havercamp spoke with a start. Memory of these things, almost outlawed by time, began to come back to him, and he had a reason for the question.

"It is no difference; yet it can do no harm to tell. Delancy was his name. He was English, young and an enthusiast. We might better have lost an older man."

"Perhaps. But all this thing is nothing to me. Van Behm took his treasures and went away. With what followed, I had no connection."

"You speak the lie with a grand air, but you cannot deceive."

"It is my word you have. Against it there is no witness."

"The fact is the witness. Can you explain it?"

"I know nothing about it, beyond what I have said."

"Urbassy and his brother were betrayed, and there was no one on earth save yourself through whom the betrayal could come. If it was through inadvertence, the sin might be pardoned."

It was a question. A bid for some sort of a plea.

Havercamp shook his head.

"The papers. If they could be recovered they would be of some service now. Are you sure they cannot be found?"

"I know nothing."

"Urbassy was a chief in our order, and he fell by treachery. Since the council was formed, no such crime has passed unpunished. Think you to escape?"

"I think nothing except that it was an evil day when I had dealings with any man who belonged to your infernal order. Do your worst."

His lips closed firmly, and he glared at the presiding officer of this mysterious court without a sign of weakness or cowardice, though death seemed very near.

"Brothers, the execution of this man was decided on, but he was given his chance. Has he said anything which might throw a doubt on the justice of his sentence?"

The speaker looked from one member to another, and as he looked each answered in turn:

"Nothing!"

"Murder me as you choose; but, as there is a ruler in the heavens, some day it shall be requited!"

Havercamp's voice sounded a trifle thready, but he did not quail as the president clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"Let the executioner come forward."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE VAULTS BELOW THE GEM.

"Pon me sowl to glory, but ye'r doin' well, Pathrick! Av Oi'm not back in the cellar, an' riddy wanst more for the drain, Oi hope Oi'm a liar from Limerick!"

The detective gave a rueful twist of his mouth as he spoke, and felt as though he would really enjoy seeing his reflection in a glass, just to note how big a fool he looked.

He felt as weak as a cat, to use the common expression, and as though, this time, there was no escape for him; yet he could not help laughing to think how he had once more blundered into the hands of this gang to whom taking a life was a joke.

"An' be the powers, the fun av it is that it's tin to wan they niver knew me, an' they'll kill me ag'in. Whin they count up their tally it's a big mistake they'll be afther makin', an' the joke will be on them."

Nevertheless, he felt sure he was not confined in the cellar which had been his prison the previous night.

There was nothing particularly familiar about the ground on which he was lying; and unless the underground connection was unexpectedly extensive, he could not have been conveyed thither.

As a general thing, the more cause Burns had for excitement the more pronounced became his brogue; it obtruded on his thoughts, even, and brought to mind strange expressions which he had not thought of since he left "the sod."

"Av Oi had ownly gone out to the Sunbeam Oi might have done somethin' av account, but Oi had to put me hi'd in the jaws av the toiger, an' now Oi may expict to fale thim snap."

His belief was natural enough, knowing, as he believed he did, the desperate nature of the gang he had undertaken to shadow; and knowing, too, how powerless he was for defense.

He could not suspect that the circle had, for the present, a surfeit of blood, and were now only fighting for time. As he was supposed to be only an assistant to a blackmailer, he was looked upon as quite like themselves, and only on the wrong side.

After a while he felt his head was clear-

ing, but to a certain extent the weakness which had almost frightened him was wearing away.

That made him suspect he had received no great physical hurt, but that once more he had been drugged as the easiest way to overpower him, and save making a racket in the Gem.

Wherever he was, it was in silence and darkness, he was bound and gagged, and unless some one came to his aid there was danger that before long he would die like a poisoned rat in a hole.

His courage continued to rise, however, in spite of circumstances.

He had been in as desperate a strait before, and some one had come. Perhaps Fly Billy would find him again.

But, after a while, there came another reaction.

There was danger in all this, and a danger that he knew and fought against.

His nerves had hardly recovered from the awful strain of the day before, and they might give way altogether.

At times he felt his flesh creep and his brain swell. Tingling flames seemed to shoot through him. How long would it be before madness came? Once, if he could have done so, he would have howled aloud in frantic terror. He felt some horrible thing was moving toward him in the darkness, which slowly assumed the shape of a fiery demon, stealthily gliding toward him with open jaws.

It was nothing of the kind; though, if he could have known the exact truth, he might have thought it was something just as bad.

It was Bob Knocker, with a dark lantern.

He came silently, but with the certainty of one who knew where he was going. Finally halting, he threw the glare of the lantern full in the detective's face.

The countenance it revealed was one to frighten a man with weaker nerves; but Bob Knocker was not much given to nerves, and had a high respect for the man whose fist had left the lump he could feel on the top of his head.

"Steady, pard," he whispered.

"The boy posted me on your being down here, and when I heard they had a bloke in quod I knew who it was to a fraction. If you can take a good turn without making a blank fool of yourself I'm going to help you out."

Burns was not too far gone to understand, and he bobbed his head, as the only intelligible signal he was capable of making.

"Not a whimper, now, my bob cull. We're both in a heap of danger here."

With this warning he removed the gag from the mouth of the detective, and before going farther touched his lips with the mouth of a flask.

The liquor gave Burns strength to stand the reaction, which came when he was once more entirely freed.

"Now, follow me as soon as you're able to turn the trick. Give the word when you're ready."

Burns stretched himself, rubbed his ankles and arms, took another drink, and gave the signal. Together they stole off, Bob Knocker showing the way.

On the first floor of the building adjoining the Gem was a narrow shop, reached by a hidden stairway.

Through this Bob was guiding the way. The room was void of any tenant just now, and almost empty of portables.

"A moment!" whispered Knocker, halting and pressing a spring in the paneling of the wall.

The act revealed a hidden door, which opened a trifle, and the crook listened, while a hum of voices drifted through the little hall in the rear of the Gem.

He would have turned away, but Burns touched him on the shoulder.

"You've done a big thing for me, my friend, an' Oi won't forget it, but Oi'm all right now, an' not in a hurry."

"You better be if you know what's sirene fur your wholesome."

"Oi followed in here afther a man who had been slugged. It was a plant av some kind, an' it will pay me to look

afther him. Can ye till me what they did with him?"

"Coopered him up and put him to doss in the room up the dancers. He's there now, and he'll stay there till morning."

"Who wor' he?"

"Can't prove it by me."

"Then I must try and see him before I go."

"Don't be a fool; and don't be a blanked fool. You hoop it out of this, and leave the bloke to take care of himself. He's all right."

"But Oi can't lave till Oi know av he's a pal ov mine."

"Then track it out of this. It's the best you can do. If they don't drop to us on the way, I can show you where you can frisk the cull without stirring the dust. Stow it, blame you, or I'll give you the shake."

Knocker began to grow savage. He could talk as mild as a May morning, or as rough as a bludgeoner from the slums.

His conversation was beginning to verge toward that of the latter, and Burns followed without a word.

They reached the street without interruption, and after going a slight distance, Bob turned into a narrow alleyway.

The window of the room up-stairs in which lay the slugged man, looked out on the rear, and almost below it was the shed roof of a little porch.

Within the room a dim light seemed to be burning, and to this Knocker pointed.

"There's your cove. I'll give you a leg up and you can deek his mug through the jump. I'll go 'round to the alley and keep my peepers peeled. If you hear me, hike it. If they meet you now they'll down you for good."

Burns had lost a good deal of his natural strength, but he was able to climb up on the shed without much trouble, and while Knocker glided away, he stole along the narrow, sloping roof toward the window.

By leaning over he found he could obtain a fairly good view of the little apartment; and first of all his glance was directed to the bed.

To his surprise he found it vacant; and he almost believed its tenant had been spirited away.

But he still remained very silent and very cautious.

A slight noise in one corner of the room caused him to lean forward, and he saw the man for whom he was searching.

His head bound up, his arm in a sling, and his whole frame trembling with weakness and excitement, he was bending over a packet of papers which had without a doubt come from an open valise at his feet.

"Ah, so it must be," Burns heard him mutter. "The seven-fold traitor! My eyes knew him, and it was as I only suspected. Yet, this night, another man shall die for his crime. How shall I save him if I get not there in time? They will wait not for Marco."

With shaking hands he ran over the papers, groaning feebly to himself.

"And the traitor knew me," he continued, "though well did I preserve my face. 'It is Marco,' he said to himself, 'and Marco must die.' The other man was honest, but he—he will come back to stab me in my sleep. And the council will never know."

He tried to move toward the bed, still clutching in his hand the papers, but lurched heavily, and had he not staggered against the wall would have fallen.

"Hist! My friend!" exclaimed Burns, in a sharp whisper.

"Oi will save yez av it's in the wood. This way. Oi don't want to get in, but sure an' Oi can hilp yez out."

Marco looked toward the window and saw the face of the detective in its corner. With rare courage he restrained all exclamation, and leaning against the wall, staggered the few paces needed to bring him to this strangely found friend.

He made some sort of a motion with his sound hand and arm, and a moment later groaned:

"One of us you are not; but you will

save a life all the same. It is not a thing in which I can send. I must go myself."

"Kape your chatter till you get out av this. Oi'll be 'azy as Oi can, but av it hurts grin and bear it."

It was hardly possible that a man so battered as this Marco could be taken down over the route they had to follow without receiving more or less of shock and pain.

When they reached the ground Marco was lying senseless in the arms of the detective, who carried him away as though he was a child, though a few minutes before he would have thought himself far enough away from being able to perform such a feat.

Up to the present time Burns had not recognized the Knocker, and did not now, or he would hardly have expected him to help in the dangerous task of getting away this load.

Yet the man who was waiting, as he had promised, did assist, and between them they got the senseless Marco out of that neighborhood, though they might not have succeeded in doing it unmolested had it not been for the coat which Bob threw over his shoulders.

A hack was what the detective wanted, and it was not so easy to get one, but fortune favored them. They caught an empty vehicle returning from one of the ferries by a course that was slightly devious, and Knocker saw the two deposited inside.

Then he turned away. He had his own affairs to look after now.

It was the intention of Burns to take the injured man to his own room and there revive him. He was too precious to be publicly exhibited until he obtained the information he wanted.

But the motion of the carriage seemed to restore the man's consciousness to a great extent, and the flask Knocker had left with them completed the work. He was weak, but wide awake.

"Ask me nothing now, but swear to me to everlastingly be silent, and we save a life. After that I will answer all you would know. Quick! Oh, we may be too late. It is near the hour!"

There was surely no delusion about this, but Burns hesitated.

"He is worth millions—a banker, and will pay you well."

At that the detective hesitated no longer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FOILED.

Helen was not without suspicion of coming evil when her father left her at Mrs. Baker's and returned to meet his engagement.

He told her nothing about its nature, and she hoped only that it had something to do with providing for his safety, or aiding the cashier, who, she felt certain, was not dead.

Between the two there had not been the confidence which she would have liked, but under the circumstances that could not be helped. She tried to throw it all off her mind for the present, and wondered if she would meet Mrs. Ferrand again, and what that strange woman might yet have to tell her.

The evening wore on, and Peter Haverkamp did not make his appearance.

Helen met her friends, of whom she had plenty, but who required no notice here. After a certain fashion she enjoyed herself, but the time arrived when she was ready to go home, and her father did not appear.

The carriage was there, and Helen decided not to linger.

The coachman was to her something of a mystery, but she had confidence in him.

"Home," she said, simply, and the vehicle rolled away.

If it had been noticed, perhaps she would not have been allowed to depart alone, for she had explained to Mr. Baker, the host, something of her father's absence; but she went away quietly, and without a shadow of fear for herself.

Being deep in her own thoughts, the car-

riage slipped along without care on her part of how it went or of knowledge where.

Surely, in the heart of New York, there should be safety for a woman. She had even forgotten for the moment the adventure returning from Mrs. Broadalbin's.

The driver held his team well in hand, but went along smartly. He was on the alert, and one might almost have suspected that he expected something to happen.

Yet, in spite of the vigilance with which he scanned the shadows on either side of the street in which a foe might be lurking, the something happened without his knowledge and without a sound.

Just in the dimmest part of the street a man who had been pressing so close to a wall that his figure missed the scrutiny of the searching eyes, darted swiftly and silently out as the vehicle had fairly passed and sprang lightly up behind.

Everything was done without a sound and with the precision of first-class mechanism.

Before Helen Haverkamp realized there was danger, a hand was resting on her face and she was powerless to move.

It was the same game that had been played on Patrick Burns at the Gem, a few hours before, and it was just as successful.

She succumbed without a sound, and almost without a struggle.

The strangest thing was that the driver had noticed nothing of what was going on.

From his seat in front he was peering anxiously at street, gutter and sidewalk, and the first intimation he had of what had occurred was hearing a hissing whisper almost at his shoulder, and the voice was the voice of Vanderlyn:

"All right up to the present time. Keep moving, and look out for the boys. We start at once. The trail begins to show dusty, and the sooner we are on blue water the better."

"All right. But if the cove ain't there to take the drag we'll never get beyond the Hook."

"Stow that. He will be there, and if we once get out of sight we'll be out of reach and dividing the spoils."

"That's the best part of it, and there's some of the boys now. They'd put up a good fight—"

He broke off suddenly.

On one side half a dozen or more figures were in sight. One man came from the pavement on the other side with a bound and seized the horses by the head.

At the same time the driver dropped the lines, swung his hands around to clutch at the throat of the man on the seat behind him, while a sharp whistle rang out on the night air.

The struggle in the carriage was brief but frightful.

The two were not in appearance fairly matched, but training had done much for the younger and smaller man.

His muscles were of steel, and his courage and skill of the highest.

In addition, he had the benefit of a momentary surprise.

One hand clutched tightly on Vanderlyn's throat, while the other caught him by the arm which had mechanically reached back for a weapon.

The grip of the driver on his throat gave an advantage over the other man which quickly began to tell. A few moments more of it, and Vanderlyn must have succumbed altogether.

He seemed to feel this, for suddenly and without warning, he flung himself out of the carriage.

The action succeeded in breaking the grip, at all events, but it also dragged him so far forward that the driver, overbalancing himself, pitched out of the vehicle.

Both were agile as leopards, and lit upon their feet, ready to continue the fight, but this time Vanderlyn dashed desperately forward, exclaiming:

"Fool! Would you sell us out?"

The men who a moment before had been seen on the sidewalk came running forward, as if to take a hand in the affray, while the man who had seized the horses'

heads, speaking to the team, urged it away.

The action unmasked a squad of men who had followed him from the other side. They threw themselves in between the vehicle and the crowd that was charging upon it.

"Surrender!" cried the leader of this reinforcement, and at the same time, with the stout locust club in his hand, he aimed a powerful blow at the arm of Vanderlyn.

His followers did not hesitate, but in the same way assaulted the gang, which had not yet had time to produce weapons.

The bone in Vanderlyn's arm cracked under the stroke received, and he staggered back, while his allies of the Golden Rule fared no better. The police were upon them and had settled down to work.

"It's the cops!" shouted Vanderlyn, disguising his voice, and quick to take notice of the desperate condition of affairs.

"The jig is up! Break for the timber!"

Suiting the action to the word, he sprang backward in time to evade a second blow which was aimed at his head, and darted away in swift retreat.

His men attempted to follow.

Some of them did escape, but several were overpowered or beaten down, and remained as prisoners. In the midst of it all the coachman regained the carriage and the vehicle rolled away in the direction of the Haverkamp mansion.

The pursuit of the fugitive rascals was vigorous, but rather unsuccessful. There was some shooting, several more were captured, but the leader and the rest of his men, having scattered, finally vanished.

Patrick Burns might have given them a pointer had he been there, but as he was not, no one guessed at the point where they might be expected to reassemble.

It was an hour later when a small boat shot out from the shadow of a dock and headed for the Sunbeam.

Vanderlyn was in the bow, his arm in a sling, while the men who pulled at the oars were allies of the Golden Rule.

As they neared the yacht, he spoke:

"With the men on board we will have hands enough to manage the craft and not enough to attract attention. It's bad for the boys who were taken, but it will be all the better for us."

"If dey don't give d'e snap away, an' put d'e coppers on d'e mark."

One of the rougher of the circle answered, while he looked suspiciously behind him, as if expecting to see danger in the rear.

Vanderlyn was not overwhelmed by the disaster, and showed more courage than he had done at the Gem.

"Never fear for them. They're all staunch, and know the dodge for them is to keep their mouths closed. Nothing can be proved against them, and they know they can trust us."

"Mebbe they kin, but blue water washes out everything."

"What do they know about blue water? Spider was the only one who knew the real plan, up to the time we struck the dock, and Spider is on board waiting for us."

Fortune appeared to have favored their plans, and they had not even met a midnight prowler on the water.

They were drifting straight for the yacht, with oars apeak, ready to take the water if the headway threatened to bring them too sharply against the vessel's side.

Several men looked over the side, and Vanderlyn recognized the Spider through the gloom.

"Sunbeam, ahoy!" exclaimed Vanderlyn in a low tone.

"There's been a break in the circle, but what's left of it are here at last."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the Spider, with a little more deference than he had lately been paying, but Vanderlyn did not notice. In spite of his broken arm he managed to swing himself on board.

And then, up from behind the bulwarks, where they had been lying unseen, sprang six men!

As for the Spider, he had been bound hand and foot!

CHAPTER XXXIII.
THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

Peter Havercamp was a man of courage, but he understood his danger.

All this with which he was charged had happened years ago, but that made no difference. He had been condemned by this tribunal, and he knew what that meant.

Every individual member of it had become a monster without mercy when the affairs of the order were concerned, and having long ago decided to sacrifice their lives when called on, were absolutely without fear.

Doubtless this executioner of whom the president spoke had been selected by lot, but any of his brethren were ready to fill his place if he should fail.

A single man stepped forward and stood by the side of the banker.

"Escape is impossible," said the president, coldly.

"Murder me if you will," was the firm response.

As he spoke the banker folded his arms and set his lips tightly together.

It was then that the clangor of a bell pealed through the house.

It was a peculiar peal, and could have been sounded only by one who was instructed beforehand.

The president held up his hand.

"It is Marco. Wait!"

Marco it was, and he came staggering in breathless, almost fainting, but determined.

"Thank Heaven that in time I am! I have learned much, and that man I believe is innocent!"

The announcement was a blow. The president stared from Marco to the prisoner and back again.

"I have seen Delancy. He is living. I took from him this. He was the traitor and the thief."

"It cannot be."

Yet the packet which Marco threw upon the table was proof such as was hard to gainsay.

"It is true. He was a thief; he is yet. I was set to watch a woman, and I became her agent for the good of the order. She knew this man, with whom she brought me face to face. More than that. He knew me. If I had not found a friend who aided me to escape he would have slain me, though he tied up my wounds which his friends had made, in a fair manner."

"It looks like proof," admitted the leader of the council, as he recognized the papers in his hands.

"It is the proof. He sold the copies and kept the originals. This man knew nothing."

"Then it is Delancy that must die!"

"Vanderlyn is his name here—and some men call him Mace. If you would punish you must strike quick. To-night he would flee—he, and his gang with him. They have their booty on his yacht, the Sunbeam, and they start for the other end of the earth. If you miss him now he may be lost forever, and vengeance not done. Quick! There is no time to lose."

A murmur of assent went around the council. The president addressed Havercamp:

"We have made a mistake, and we do not want to cover it up with your death. Swear to us that nothing of what has happened to you this night shall be told for twenty-four hours, and we turn you loose."

"If I have your assurance that your order has done with me forever I will swear," replied Havercamp, without hesitation.

"An' Oi'll take the same oath, an' show yez where the Sunbeam loies," said a strange voice, and Patrick Burns stepped forward.

"Yez can't be too harrud on the scamp, Vanderlyn; an' av ye won't trate, be the powers, we'll fight. Oi'm ownly wan, but Oi'm a lion."

The detective had armed himself again as he passed his room, and with a revolver in each hand, now faced the council, ready

to be friend or foe, as they might choose to elect.

His coming might have complicated matters had Marco not had the strength to tell what Burns had done for him.

He had not known or thought that the detective had slipped in behind him, but he was loyal to the man who had saved him from the Gem.

The oath was taken, and Havercamp, escorted to the hack that was waiting around a neighboring corner, went home like a man in a maze.

Patrick Burns was not required to act as guide, but he told where the Sunbeam lay, and assured them that without doubt Vanderlyn was anticipating an early retreat, and that all suspicion had been allayed by preparing for a trip to be taken a day later with his friends of the Chrysanthemums.

What they might think when they found him gone he no doubt neither knew nor cared.

As usual, Burns had blundered onto his feet, and if he had not found Heathcote he was the means of rescuing the banker.

Meantime he did not care to look too closely at the masked faces of these men, and was only too well satisfied when he and Havercamp were well out of their clutches.

He made his way to the residence of the banker, for he had some things to tell him which he thought should no longer be deferred, and found him just about to start in search of his daughter.

Neither she nor the carriage had returned, as yet, from Mrs. Baker's soiree.

"An' you trusted her with that thafe ov the worruld? Be the powers! It's a murderin' devil he is, from the slums, an' his name is Bob Kocker! What the game is Oi'm not onto, as yit, but this thing has gone beyont the specials. You betther go to the chafe of poliss, an' tourn in a jeneral alarm."

And, even while he spoke the door opened, and Helen came in, leaning on the arm of the pseudo Bob Kocker, whose right name was Harry Heathcote!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FINAL STITCHES.

"Horrible Mystery.—A Tragedy on the Yacht Sunbeam.—Was it Suicide or a Murder?—The Well-Known Clubman, Roger Vanderlyn, the Victim."

These were the scare-lines of the papers the next afternoon, with variations and emendations and improvements. The story told in all of them was substantially the same.

The yacht was found deserted of every living occupant, and Roger Vanderlyn, the Clubman-Crook, was hanging from the bowsprit dead.

Something was said about the Chrysanthemums, and a projected trip that some of its members had been invited to make with the owner, but for once Beechy Lyman understood the dignity of silence, and the balance of the club did not care to make statements for the newspapers.

The Spider and the rest of the Circle had vanished and left no sign. Outside of the Council of the Seven there were just two men living who knew what the ghastly spectacle at the Sunbeam meant, but those two, being bound by an oath, held their peace.

There was also a minor item in the same papers in regard to the raiding of a dive, or low gambling house, called the Gem.

Some arrests were made, but as nothing farther was heard about it, the probabilities were there was no evidence against the men who were taken, and they were eventually turned loose.

But the Circle of the Golden Rule passed out of existence with the death of its chief, the Clubman Crook, and its members were scattered.

For reasons of his own Harry Heathcote kept silent, and it was no un-

til long after that the true story leaked out.

Some days afterward Havercamp received a package by express, sent from a distant city.

It contained one hundred thousand dollars.

With it was a brief note, which stated that the amount had fallen into the sender's hands, along with the information that it was taken from the Nail and Lumber Bank by a party since deceased, and was accordingly forwarded.

The money was undoubtedly sent by the Supreme Council of the Seven. Probably the treasure of the Golden Rule fell into their hands when they captured the Sunbeam; and it may have been they received their information from the Spider, or some other member of the Circle; but Havercamp never knew for certain who it came from.

Some time afterward a partially decomposed body was found floating in the bay. The features were obliterated, and it passed through the Morgue without attracting attention, though it was discovered that the seeming young man was of the feminine sex.

Some little time previous Delphine had received a telegram from New Orleans, ordering her to join her mistress there, and to bring all her belongings with her.

This, perhaps, was the reason why the body on the slab was never identified as the mortal remains of the dashing adventuress, whom Mr. Grimsby for a long time lamented, and concerning whom Havercamp forever held his peace.

Bob Kocker disappeared. Harry Heathcote had bought him, body and soul, that night, as much by reason of the fact Kocker had learned that at the last moment the Circle intended to get rid of him; and he thought it was well to take time by the forelock.

Owing to the extraordinary resemblance of the two men, it had not been hard for Heathcote to act as his double in the scheme of Vanderlyn to get Kocker introduced at Havercamp's to aid in the abduction of Helen, in case the opportunity should occur.

During the day the original Kocker was on duty, but in the evening the two changed places again.

It was Heathcote who arranged to have the police on hand to defeat the attack on the carriage, which he did by the use of the banker's name, and a note of introduction with which he had been previously provided.

Robert certainly earned his money, and it is to be hoped that he turned over a new leaf on the Pacific slope, to which he journeyed.

The reader need hardly be told that the robbery of the bank was a "plant."

In spite of his seeming position, Havercamp had his suspicion of the mogul of the Chrysanthemums. He could not be sure, but believed he had been identified abroad with the secret order which had notified the banker it was on his track.

The bank president had confided his danger to the young cashier, who had undertaken at all hazards to ferret out the truth.

An apparent hitch in the arrangements had induced Havercamp to have a search made for him, though he was careful to cover up all tracks of anything irregular at the bank.

The result was: Heathcote saved Helen, who was not supposed to be in any danger at all; while blundering Pat Burns did the same for Havercamp, and the "consideration" for the blunder was duly forthcoming.

Detective Pat still drops in occasionally at the Chrysanthemums—which has not been disorganized—and his brogue is as spotted as ever.

He calls oftener, however, on Miss Norah, and to this day has not finished telling her why he is educating Fly Billy and the history of his strange adventures with the Circle of the Golden Rule.

THE END.

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